

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOL. 8, No. 1.

JANUARY 1968



15519

NEWS LETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 8, No. 1

January 1968

CONTENTS

The Shikra. by Zafar Futehally.	1
Wildfowl Counts. by C.W. Savage.	2
The World Wildlife Fund. by Zafar Futehally.....	5
Recordings of some Migrant Birds. by T.V. Jose.	6
Fighting Habits of the White Wag-tail. by T.V. Jose. ...	7
Anting. by Pratap Singh.	7
Review.	8
Correspondence.	8

THE SHIKRA (*Accipiter badius*)

By

Zafar Futehally.

For the past several weeks there has been a Shikra in our garden, and it is thrilling to watch it on every occasion. It is not an easy bird to see, but fortunately it calls quite frequently and so indicates its presence in the neighbourhood. Its loud, sharp, double note ti tiu ti tiu alarms all the creatures: the hen tending its brood, the palm squirrels on the trees, and all the birds. The crows, of course are not alarmed, but they all flock around the hunter from a safe distance indulge in the jeering which characterises all creatures with a debased character.

Our garden has many large trees, and below the Queens Flower tree there is a small pond. For some reason, from time to time, there is a population explosion of frogs in the pond, and this year there are more than ever before. It is this situation which has attracted the shikra to our garden. A few evenings ago I saw the bird alight silently on the Queens Flower, and stay there surveying the scene and the opportunities for a meal. For a quarter of an hour it was almost motionless. Then it started to fidget a bit and I could sense that it had decided to pounce on one of the frogs in the pond. It glided down from the branch, lifted a frog from the water with its talons, and settled down on the ground with the victim helpless, pierced with its sharp claws. The frog squealed for a while but was soon silent, and the shikra tugged away at it with its sharp beak for quite a while. It is obviously slow work dealing with a frog and the bird then flew away with it on a Mango tree and was lost to view. It was curious that while the shikra was tearing the frog to bits, two other frogs looked placidly on from the edge of the pond, and seemed quite oblivious to the danger to which

Incidentally, a couple of years ago when there was such a population explosion of frogs, a Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) came to deal with them. Lacking the sharp talons of the Shikra, the heron had great difficulty in dealing with the frogs only by its bill, and several frogs escaped after the initial lightening thrust had paralysed them. Dealing with such a slippery customer as a frog only by a bill with no assistance from its weak toes, made the problem difficult for the heron, but nevertheless, it quickly reduced the frog population drastically. Perhaps the Shikra will do the same.

A few days ago the Shikra pounced on a Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides somervellii*) scrounging on our lawn. In the normal course the Babbler would have been killed, but the Shikra suddenly saw us in the verandah and flew away. The Babbler remained stunned for several seconds and then joined its community, which incidentally had flown away, without a thought for their unfortunate companion.

Like all birds of prey the female Shikra is much larger than the male. Though the usual method of hunting is to take the quarry by surprise by lying in wait quietly in a leafy tree, the birds often soar in circles in the air. A good description of this is given by G.M. Henry in his *Birds of Ceylon*.

† † † †

* * * *

† † † †

WILDFOWL COUNTS

Readers will recall that last year a Wildfowl Count was organised in January by Mr. C.W. Savage, and the process has now got to be repeated. The letter reproduced below tells all about it, and the form which follows should be filled up carefully and sent to the Editor who will forward it to Mr. Savage. Please be certain about your identifications before entering the data on the form. When in doubt always put a question mark after the entry. I hope many of our readers will participate in this interesting and useful exercise. To put you in the proper frame of mind, an extract from the *Time Magazine* (kindly sent by Runvar Shri Iavkumar) is also reproduced here: [Ed.]

GETTING THE BIRD

The name of the operation is called variously the "May Run", the "Grim Grind" or the "Big Day." Its object is to identify, by sight and song, as many species of birds as possible in a 24-hour period. The time is now, when, because of the late spring, the northward migration is still going strong. Across the nation, bird watchers - they number over 8,000,000 in all - are out in full force.

The basic equipment for birders, who operate in teams of two or more so that there is at least one corroborating witness, is simple: binoculars, a copy of Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds*, and a car to enable them to cover a greater variety of habitats quickly. Thus, beginning at dawn, 20 members of Florida's Pelican Island Audubon Society raced through the boondocks south of Cape Kennedy to cover a 15-mile-wide circle of fresh-water marshes, piny woods and citrus groves; whenever their cars stopped, their binoculars popped up and down like yo-yos. They quit early at dusk, satisfied at having spotted 129 species, including such rarities as the upland plover and the western kingbird.

Cherry Bombs & Tapes: In Delaware, Dave Cutler, who can identify more than 200 birds by song alone, led his five-man team over 500 miles of rain-swept back roads. Armed with a supply of cherry bombs (to startle sleeping birds into song) and a portable tape player programmed with 42 different calls (to trick them into answering), the team identified 187 species.

For some 150 New York City birders, the search centered on Long Island's Jamaica Bay, where the stealthier spotters bellied through the wet marsh grass as if sneaking up on a machine-gun nest. Though they found a number of rare birds, they were disappointed at total counts, which were as small as 100 species. And in Illinois, 50 members of the Champaign County Audubon Society slogged through mud and rain, uphill and down, for views of herons and chimney swifts, wood ducks and Blackburnian warblers - and a day's total of 100.

So dogged were the birders that even the birds far at sea were under surveillance. Nearly 100 members of California's Golden Gate Audubon Society set out in a three-ship flotilla for the three-hour cruise to the offshore Farallon Islands. In the process, the birders had to weather a sickening swell, the pungent aroma of the guano-splattered Farallons and the even more pungent smell of overripe suet, thrown overboard for bait. For their fortitude they were rewarded with such rarities as Brandt's cormorants, tufted puffins, pink-footed shearwaters and a couple of black-footed albatrosses.

Backyard Beginnings: The birder must be physically fit to slog through swamps, intellectually alert to recognize the innumerable species he might encounter, keen enough to thrill at the sight of a great blue heron overhead. But what gets him started in the first place? "We began watching birds in our backyard," explains Seismologist James Ellis. "Then we didn't recognize a bird, so we bought a cheap book. Then there were more birds, so we bought a more expensive book. It grabbed San Francisco's Raymond Higgs so hard that he bought an \$800 Questar telephoto lens in order to photograph them better."

What keeps them birding, despite such avocational aches and pains from gazing skyward as "warbler's neck" and "Audubon back"? Partly, it is the challenge of building an ever bigger lifetime list. "It gets to be a game to see how many species you can find," says Florida's Maggie Bowman. Chirps Sharon Lumsden, of Champaign, Ill., who has 279 birds on her list: "We've seen 96 birds in our backyard alone." Adds San Francisco's Valeria Da Costa, whose list contains 600 of the U.S.'s 700-odd birds: "There are only two warblers I haven't seen in the entire country."

* * * *

ASATIC WILDFOWL WORKING GROUP

WILDFOWL SURVEY.

Under the auspices of the International Wildfowl Research Bureau

and

The Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, Glos, England.

C/O, Post Bag 704,
11-F Gulberg,
Lahore, West Pakistan.

To all correspondents

WILDFOWL COUNTS - 1967/68

Last year most of you collaborated in the January 1967 Wildfowl Census, and if any of you have not received individual acknowledgement and thanks please accept my apologies. Broadly speaking the results last year were a great success in that much new information came to light besides being the first step towards quantitative assessment of the wildfowl populations of Asia and the Middle East. In all we had records of over 1/4 million ducks from a hundred different localities covering possibly about 1/250 of the total wildfowl habitat range between Iraq and Assam/East Pakistan. This compares with European and North African counts of nearly 2 1/2 million in 3,400 localities. A further 3 1/2 million were estimated in the USSR based on aerial counts using 25 aircraft. The European counts appear to have covered the greater part of the

Wildfowl habitat, but in the USSR the counts still covered only a fraction of the total.

The last census has shown the tremendous potential value of these counts and has provided a valuable stimulus to development of International co-operation in wildfowl conservation. The results were presented and discussed at a recent meeting of the IUCN Ecology Commission in Turkey which was jointly sponsored by the International Wildfowl Research Bureau (IWRB). As a result of these discussions it is proposed that extra special efforts should be made this winter in order to provide a sound factual basis for proposals being prepared for presentation at the International Wildfowl Conference to be held in Leningrad in September, 1968.

This year it is specially important to include as many counts of geese as possible (this was serious defect in last winters counts); also Flamingos should be included, and Coots. The latter have declined markedly in recent years and Coots have been included this year at the request of the USSR.

I shall be writing to you again shortly with aerogramme forms for sending us the results of the mid-January counts. In the meantime I enclose copies of the new wildfowl Count forms which I should be grateful if you could use for keeping all records of counts/estimates/sightings. The most useful of all will be regular monthly counts.

Yours sincerely,

C.W. Savage.

* * * *

* * * * *

* * * * *

THE WORLD WILD LIFE FUND

By

Zafar Futehally.

On the 15th December, Lord Fermoy an Associate of the Fund gave a talk at the Bombay Natural History Society. H.H. Patesinrao Gaskwad of Baroda, a Trustee of the Fund presided. The Indian National Appeal will be formulated perhaps at the time of the IUCN General Assembly and we in India must help this cause, for the obvious reason that we will be helping our own country in the process. Lord Fermoy spoke of the work which the WWF is doing on a world scale and also gave an account of his recent visit to Pakistan, where a team of conservationists led by Guy Mountfort surveyed several areas with a view to their establishment as Sanctuaries and National Parks. Conservation policies in Pakistan are of particular interest to this country for obvious reasons.

Most of our readers are perhaps familiar with the objectives of the WWF, but in any case this appeal from David Attenborough, of the British National Appeal is worth pondering over: "I am asking for your help to prevent a disaster - A disaster which could affect us all. The situation is simply this:

There are more human beings in this country today, and indeed in the world, than ever before. We all need places to live, factories in which to work, roads on which to travel, fields in which to grow food. Next year we shall need even more. We are claiming these things, we must, but every time we do so we do it at the cost of destroying the natural world. Sometimes we do it carelessly, without thought, sometimes greedily, sometimes even unnecessarily, and the weapons and techniques with which we do so are more powerful, more devastating than ever before. Because we want oil we have hunted the whale until now it is almost extinct. We have invented poisons of appalling efficiency, and because we want to get rid of some insect pests, we have thoughtlessly spread them wholesale to kill not only those pests but also butterflies and whole populations of song-birds. Modern technology has devised powerful detergents, and when we have used them we empty them into our rivers and turn what was once a stretch of water rich with fish, flowering plants and dragonflies into a stinking sewer. Everywhere animals and plants are being destroyed wholesale and - and this is the point - only too often, unnecessarily.

Within three human generations man has totally exterminated one hundred different kinds of animals, and this thoughtless slaughter, far from coming to an end, is now rising to a crescendo. At this very moment no less than a thousand creatures are in desperate danger of extinction - the mountain gorilla, the birds of paradise, the Arabian oryx, the Javan rhinoceros - these and many more are on their way to being, like the Passenger Pigeon and the Great Auk, creatures which survive only as a few faded skins in museums. Even the commonest animals are now being forced out of the places where once they flourished.

Ironically enough, it is not just the animals that are paying the price of man's rapidly increasing numbers; it is man himself; it is us. For leaving aside all the benefits that the animals can bring us, both economically and scientifically, the natural world has always been a source of joy and solace to mankind. We are after all part of it, and yet in our headlong rush to provide for our immediate wants we seem set on creating a world that is not worth living in - a sterile and empty wasteland.

Yet I repeat, much of this destruction is unnecessary, even now at this late stage the disaster can be averted. We must make sure that no more woodlands and rivers and moorlands are destroyed simply because of lack of planning or because of greed; that no more animals are poisoned because they are pretty and rare. Above all we must select the really important wild places and keep them as refuges and sanctuaries where animals will truly be safe.

That is the long term need, but there are also urgent rescue operations that must be mounted if we are to save the last survivors of creatures that are on the brink of destruction.

The World Wildlife Fund is tackling both jobs. It has provided money to save the wilderness of Coto Donana in Spain which is a vital staging post for migrant birds coming to this country. In Africa it is paying for wardens to stop the poaching of big game.

In this country it helps the County Naturalist Trusts and the Council for Nature to create and support Nature Reserves.

Every day we get urgent calls for help. There are many that we cannot answer for lack of funds. For some of them next year will be too late. Please help us now."

India has more mammals, more birds, and more spectacular scenery than almost any other country. We must see that our National Appeal is well supported, and we wish H.H. Patesinrao Gaekwad of Baroda every success.

* * * *

* * * *

* * * *

These are the recordings of some of the birds (migrants) which I saw first in each season (starting from the end of rainy season to the beginning of the other). Late days have been left out.

	<u>Name of birds</u>	<u>Date</u>
1.	Common Swallows (Hirundo rustica)	3.10.65 1.10.66
2.	Common Brown Headed Sea-gull (Larus Brunni Cephalus)	16.10.66 15.10.67
3.	Rufous backed shrike (Lanius schach)	25.9.66 24.9.67
4.	White Wag tail (Motacilla alba)	3.10.65 19.10.66 8.10.67
5.	Golden Oriole (Oriolus oriolus)	9.9.67
6.	Common Green Bee-eater (Merops orientalis)	7.10.66 1.10.67
7.	Paradise Fly catcher (Terpsiphone paradisi)	14.11.65 5.10.66

The bird seen in both the occasions was either a hen or just a pre-mature bird, for it had no streaming tail or had it white plumes all over the body. It was typical chest not red above and under parts drab white and in both the years the bird ceased to be seen afterwards.

8. Pied crested cuckoo
(Clamator jacobinus)

The sound heard on 19.12.65 was followed with caw-cawing of crows, but the bird itself was not seen. The last 3 or 4 days sharp cry of the bird was heard but seen it on 11.6.67 in the hands of a boy with primaries clipped off.

As for Common sandpipers (Tringa hypoleucos), I am doubtful whether they ever migrate far away because their presence is not missed long. Not only that, if there is no rain for two or three days at a stretch during monsoon season they, at least a few of them, are sure to appear

at the sea shore, piping sad, melancholy, note often and flying from one mud embankment to the other in a somewhat restless mood.

T.V. Jose
Colaba.

* * * * *

* * * * *

* * * * *

FIGHTING HABITS OF THE WHITE WAG-TAIL (MOTACILLA ALBA)

By

T. V. Jose

In my morning round on 10.12.57 I came upon two white wag-tails chirping excitedly on the sea-shore, and not feeding. I noticed there was something unusual about them, and I sat down on a clod of earth facing the birds, about 20 ft. away from me.

One bird would walk towards the other for sometime, while the other continued to move farther away from the advancing one; but the former soon returns. Immediately the latter turns about and approaches the bird now retreating. The latter's progress however stops the same way when it nears the former. This type of restless, seemingly purposeless, and monotonous movement continues. But sometimes I see, as one walks forward to the other, as one of its unaccomplished attacks, it flaps its wings and springs up closing them and down it comes in a loop. Generally this mark of pugnacity is ignored by the other, but there are occasions in which the other takes up the challenge and meets the other with pointed vehemence in the air. Both try to peck at each other face to face and at the same time try to avoid each other's charges.

After 15 minutes manoeuvre, and about half a dozen actual duels each lasting only seconds, I find their fighting mood is waning, and they are seen moving away from each other.

* * * * *

* * * * *

* * * * *

ANTING

By

Pratap Singh

"Anting" by birds is a phenomena which the ornithologists are aware of but which they rarely witness. I had the good luck of watching this behaviour the other day and which may be of interest to the readers.

Early in the morning of 2nd December, I saw a female Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) alight on the ground near the fence, and then, in its typical purposeful manner, hopped up to pick up something and with it hurriedly started rubbing the under part of the tail and the wing feathers. It then dropped the pick, hopped up to another point and repeated the procedure with the other wing and the tail. My curiosity having aroused I watched closely. The bird repeated this procedure nearly 12 times in 7 minutes with several ants crawling at the place. In the majority of cases it would drop the ant, having rubbed it, but in three cases it ate them. The bird, undisturbed, continued the activity at leisure and having drawn full satisfaction flew up to the fence from where it was disturbed by a Montague's Harrier. I did not notice any expression of entrancement on the part of the bird, though that is consequential. As to the ants, there was nothing special about them; they were the ordinary large black ants commonly found everywhere.

* * * * *

* * * * *

* * * * *

Review:

COMMON BIRDS by Salim Ali and Laeeq Futehally, published in the Series "India - The Land & People" by the National Book Trust, India (pp. 118, 5½" x 8", paper back edition) available for Rs 9/-.

It was the desire of the late Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, that this Series of books on India should provide a library of knowledge on every aspect of this country. This is yet another book in this Series.

It is the purpose of this book to enable the novice in bird-watching to learn to recognize with confidence, the common birds of his locality.

To enable him to do so this book provides 97 clear colour plates with descriptions of more than a hundred birds. The birds are arranged in the present practice of starting from grebes and finishing with the finches.

A brief description of each order is given and the relevant families under each order is named and when required described. The more common species have been described in detail.

In the descriptions the birds are alive. They are shown to be moving about in their natural locality, eating their habitual food, making their usual calls and generally behaving in their characteristic ways.

In the old days neither good field glasses nor adequately illustrated bird books were available. As such, the "respectable" naturalist killed birds and collected their skins and eggs. Books written by them give very minute details of the feathers on the dead skins and a somewhat guesome and scientific sounding account of the skull bones and leg tendons. Such things are completely avoided here.

The initial chapters of this book are devoted to Introduction, Ornithology & Birdwatching, Reproduction and Migration. The book instructs the bird watcher as to how to identify a bird in the field and stresses the importance of placing it in the right family. Even birds which are not in this book can be later on identified by reference to a more complicated work if the bird can be placed in the proper family.

In every way this book meets the requirement of the interested common man and the beginner in birdwatching. Being copiously illustrated the book will make an excellent birthday present for children and start them off on an instructive and rewarding hobby.

* * * * *

* * * * *

* * * * *

CORRESPONDENCE:

Appearance of Brahmini Duck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) and Dabchick (*Podiceps ruficollis*).

Early in the morning of 12.11.1967 during my usual round I came across three ducks apprehensively floating in the centre of the back water, bordering Colaba Sea Shore. For the first time I saw such large ducks in these waters. They were, for added safety, trying to align themselves with a patch of brown headed gulls present there. The latter did not appear to be unfriendly towards the strangers, for they tolerated them in their midst. But straggling crows caught sight of the new-comers, and their typical reaction was one of envy. The Black fraternity hovered over, and

Now made attempts to peck at the ducks in a clumsy way. Against this pestering pestilence, the concerned duck raised its head and protested "aank", "aank".

Meanwhile corvine enthusiasm had worked itself out, and the crows left the scene. The ducks settled down to feed. They did not dive, but their probing head went at times deep down, their horizontality turning into perpendicularity and the black tips of tail sticking up into the air in a ridiculous fashion.

The whole day I saw them there but always they were wary and never approached the mud-banks. Perhaps they may have had experience of what humans are like.

I also observed a solitary dabchick which was the first one I had ever observed during the last 13 or 14 years.

T.V. Jose
Colaba.

THIS NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED EVERY MONTH.
SUBSCRIPTION RATE: Rs 5/= PER YEAR.

Zafer Futehally,
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers,
32-A, Juhu Lane,
Andheri,
BOMBAY 58-AS.

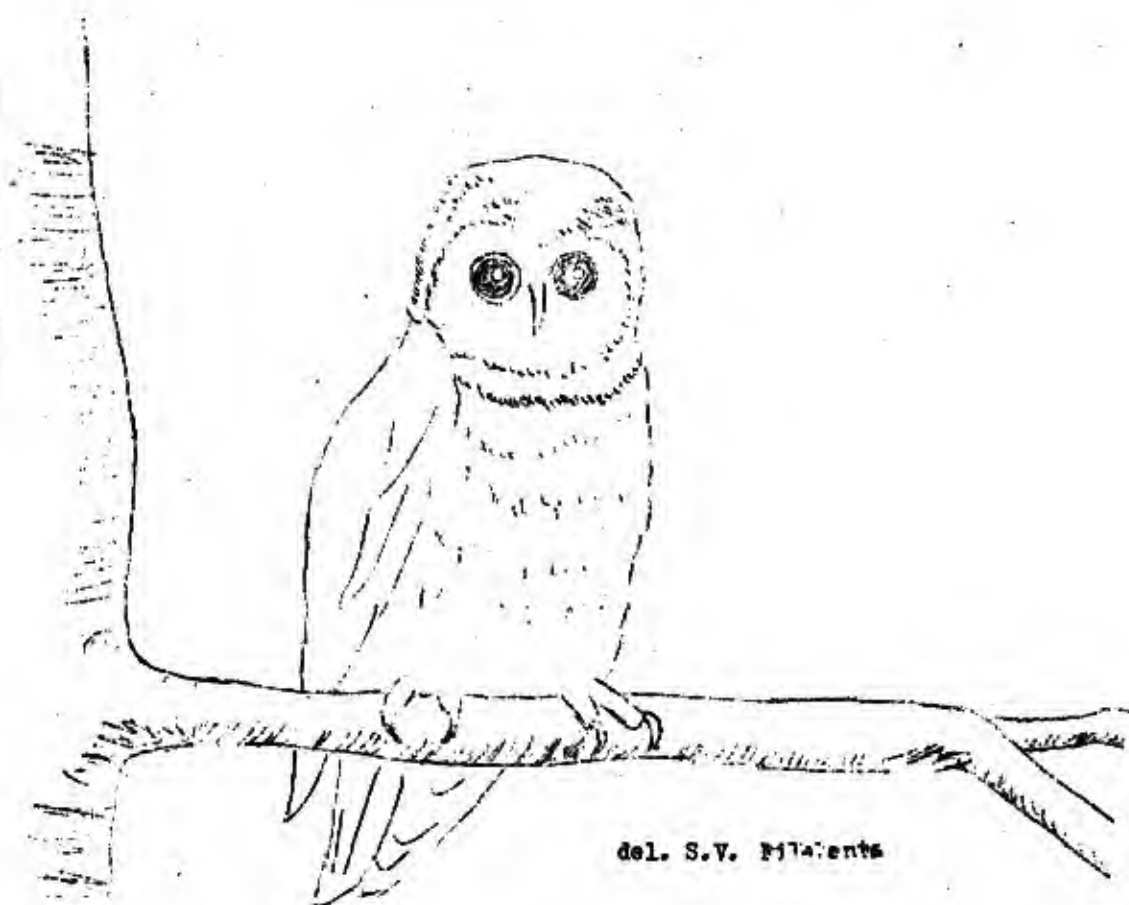
A Correction: In the October '67 issue, the article on *Foster Parens* has been written by Major J.C. Mahanti and not by Major M. Mahanti.

-ED.

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 8 No 2 1968 February

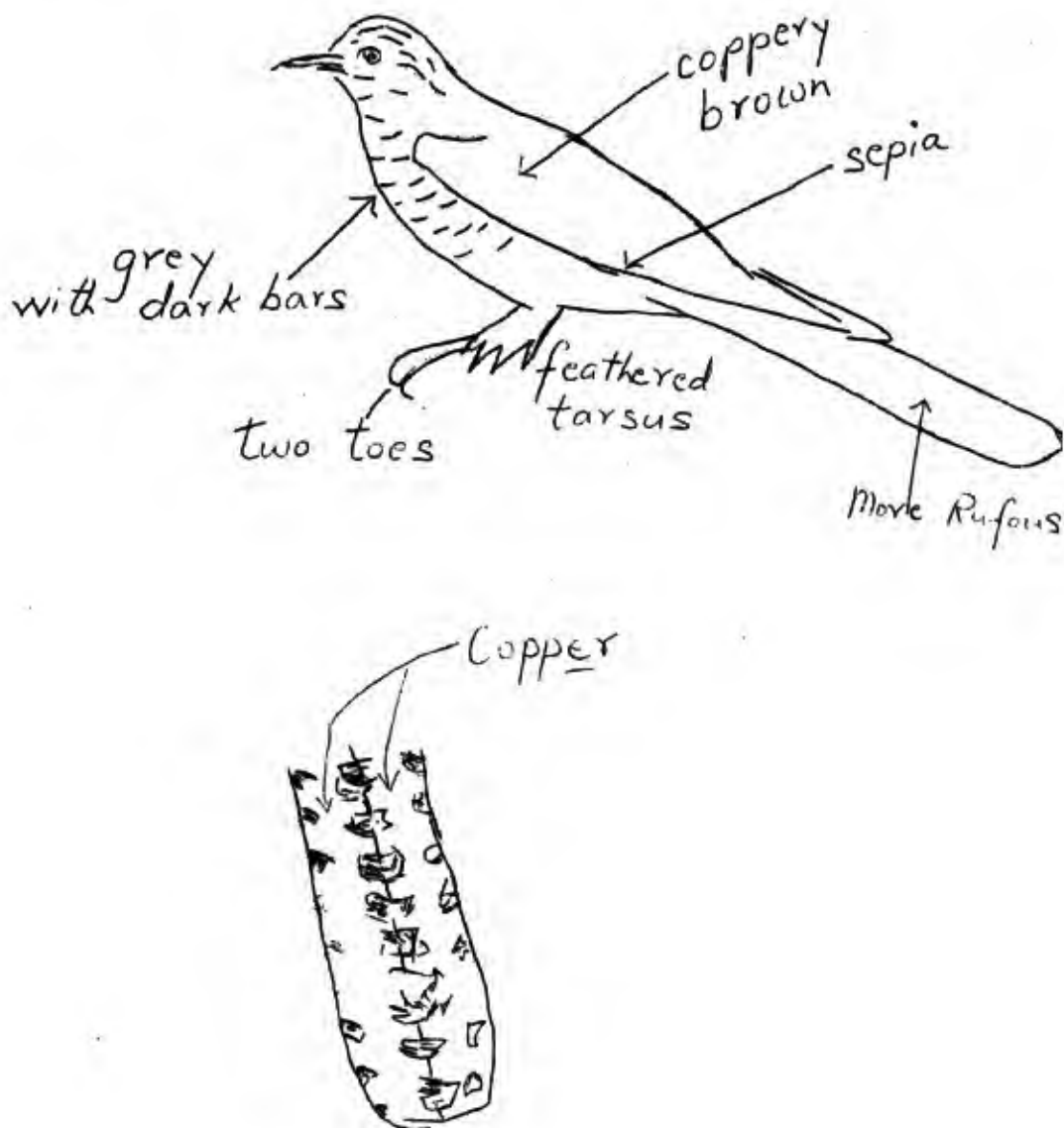


del. S.V. Filantes

The file reveals an interesting piece of correspondence from Stewart Mellaish to the editor, concerning an unidentified cuckoo :-

18th Feb. '67.

...I have had another look at the little drawing I did of the Karnala cuckoo and reproduce here more or less what I recorded on the spot. Although I wrote 'grey' near the head I did suggest streaks in the sketch. The tail as I sketched it is more like the tail in Henry's Plate I4 than that in the line drawing on page I70. The Hawk-Cuckoo Henry says is about the size of a domestic pigeon, while the Bay-banded is 'rather smaller than the Common Mynah'. I did not note down the size of our bird but have a recollection of a fairly small bird.





THE PIED BUSH CHAT, THE PIED CHAT, AND
STRICKLAND'S CHAT.

Drawn above are the three pied birds which visit Saurashtra during the winter, and are common in open country, particularly so in the drier parts and where there are rocky ravines.

The Pied Bush Chat is more frequent in cultivation and will be seen perched on a stalk atop a haystack. It can be easily identified by the white belly, rump and patches on either wing. These patches are also found in the male Indian Robin, but the Robin has no other white, and besides he is easily identified by his cocked tail and the russet patch under his tail.

The Pied Wheatear or Chat is a handsome bird with a boldly contrasting pied plumage. There are no white patches on the wings, but the tail like the rump flashes conspicuously in flight. The white tail has a black band at the end. Notice the absence of any white in the tail of the Pied Bushchat.

The Strickland's Chat closely resembles the Pied Chat, but can be recognised by the fact that the black on the lower parts extends to the belly. In flight as this Chat goes away from the observer, it is easily overlooked as a Pied Chat. Possibly this is one of the reasons why it is less recorded, though of course it does not come to us in the same numbers as the Pied.

A third black and white chat which infrequently drops in is the White-headed Chat *Oenanthe capistrata*. Members of the Rajkot Group have recorded this and the Strickland's Chats this season.

The Dhayal also known as the Magpie Robin is the fourth pied bird we have with us, but it is much larger than all these, and has white in the wings and tail. The tail is cocked and flicked open energetically. Dhayals inhabit shady gardens and irrigated 'wadis'.

Yadav

'Selborne, Aug. 7, 1778

'A good ornithologist should be able to distinguish birds by their air as well as ~~by~~ their colours and shape; on the ground as well as on the wing, and in the bush as well as in the hand. For, though it must not be said that every species of birds has a manner peculiar to itself, yet there is somewhat in most genera at least, that at first sight discriminates them, and enables a judicious observer to pronounce upon them with some certainty. Put a bird in motion '.... Et vera incessu patuit.'

'Thus kites and buzzards sail round in circles with wings expanded and motionless; and it is from their gliding manner that the former are still called in the north of England gleads, from the Saxon verb glidan, to glide. The kestrel or wind-hover, has a peculiar mode of hanging in the air in one place, his wings all the while being briskly agitated. Hen-harriers fly low over heaths or fields of corn, and beat the ground regularly like a pointer or setting-dog. Owls move in a buoyant manner, as if lighter than the air; they seem to want ballast. There is a peculiarity belonging to ravens that must draw the attention even of the most incurious -- they spend all their leisure time in striking and cuffing each other on the wing in a kind of playful skirmish; and when they move from one place to another, frequently turn on their backs with a loud croak, and seem to be falling to the ground. When this odd gesture betides them, they are scratching themselves with one foot, and thus lose the centre of gravity. Rooks sometimes dive and tumble in a frolicsome manner; crows and daws swagger in the walk; woodpeckers fly volatu undoso, opening and closing their wings at every stroke, and so are always rising or falling in curves. All of this genus use their tails, which incline downward, as a support while they run up trees. Parrots, like all other hooked-clawed birds, walk awkwardly, and make use of their bill as a third foot, climbing and descending with ridiculous caution. All the Gallinae parade and walk gracefully, and run mimble; but fly with difficulty, with an impetuous whirring, and in a straight line. Magpies and jays flutter with powerless wings, and make no dispatch; herons seem encumbered with too much sail for their light bodies; but these vast hollow wings are necessary in carrying burthens, such as large fishes, and the like; pigeons, and particularly the sort called smiters, have a way of clashing their wings the one against the other over their backs with a loud snap; another variety called tumblers turn themselves over in the air. Some birds have movements peculiar to the season of pairing: thus ring-doves, though strong and rapid at other times, yet in the spring hang about on the wing in a toying and playful manner; thus the cock-snipe, while bleeding, forgetting his former flight, fans the air like the wind-hover: and the greenfinch in particular exhibits such languishing and faltering gestures as to appear like a wounded and dying bird; the kingfisher darts along like an arrow; fern-owls, or goat-suckers, glance in the dusk over the tops of trees like a meteor; starlings, as it were, swim along, while missel-thrushes use a wild and desultory flight; swallows sweep over the surface of the ground and water, and distinguish themselves by rapid turns and quick evolutions; swifts dash round in circles; and the bank martin moves with frequent vacillations like a butterfly. Most of the small birds fly by jerks, rising and falling as they advance. Most small birds hop; but wagtails and larks walk, moving their legs alternately. Skylarks rise and fall perpendicularly as they sing; woodlarks hang poised in the air; and titlarks rise and fall in large curves, singing in their descent. The whitethroat uses odd jerks and gesticulations over the tops of hedges and bushes. All the duck kind waddle, divers and auks walk as if fettered, and stand erect on their tails: these are the compedes of Idnaeus. Geese and cranes, and most wild fowls, move in figured flights, often changing their position. The secondary remiges of Tringae, wild ducks, and some others, are very long, and give their wings, when in motion, a hooked appearance. Dabchicks, moorhens, and coots, fly erect, with their legs hanging down, and hardly make any dispatch; the reason is plain, their wings are placed too forward out of the true centre of gravity; as the legs of auks and divers are situated too backward.'

NATURE'S PARADISE - Africa. By Jen and Des Bartlett. Collins, 5gns., pp. 360

This is a large, heavy, magnificently produced book, dealing minutely with African Wild Life from the starfish on the coasts to the giant hogs of the forests or the wildebeest on the plains. It is divided into eight sections, devoted in turn to the natural history of the Eastern Coral Reef, the 'dry thornbush country', 'open bush and woodland', the plains, 'the changing scene' (dealing, and it makes a most interesting chapter, with areas where ever there has been any human encroachment -- dammed lakes, or districts where animals are professionally caught for zoos -- the lakes, the tropical forests, and the snow-mountains at the equator.

The book consists of large photographs rather than anything else, and these logically arranged, fully captioned photographs are one step forward from written matter in such a book, as they naturally bring the layman much closer to the wild life itself. And as there are several pictures for each bird or animal species, showing it in various actions and situations, a clearly-defined and substantial education in African natural life comes easily, while merely looking through these pictures. The photographs are in colour as well as black and white and are outstandingly good, some of them quite breath-taking. They include some beautiful double-page ones.

However, each 'chapter' has a written introduction of three or four pages, and as the authors have obviously travelled extensively on the continent for at least a decade, this factual background is consistently illustrated by sympathetic personal experience.

The book is to be followed by similar publications on America and Australia.

Shama Putehally

NOTES AND COMMENTS

On behalf of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India we would like to congratulate Dr Salim Ali on being awarded the Gold Medal of the British Ornithological Union for 1967. We feel that this is an entirely merited honour, and by association, consider ourselves honoured as well, since he is a member of our Board of Editors.

CORRESPONDENCE

WATERPOWL COUNT.

I am now doing the counting of migratory ducks and drakes in Nagpur district. I remember that the information was asked for in 1966 by Bombay Natural History Society and to contact you for any further information regarding the same.

I may kindly be intimated as to whether the census is still being taken at all the places. I regret that I could not do this work last year due to ill health and for this year I will be sending you the information obtained by me at the close of winter season. May I make a request to you to provide me with the plates of these migratory species, if available, which I feel will be of much use to me.

I may be informed whether any other person is doing the counting at Bhandara and Chanda districts which possess good number of lakes for counting.

T. S. Venugopalan
D.S. Murti's Bungalow, Near Post Office
Dhantoli, Nagpur. December 29, 1967.

WEAVER BIRDS.

During my observation at Nagpur and Hyderabad I found one pair of Weaver Birds building 2 to 3 nests; one of them was always incomplete. Among these nests only one nest was containing eggs. I have read that Weaver Birds build as many as five nests.

Another interesting observation was only one pair used fibre taken out from date tree leaves.

I shall be pleased to know the observation made by others with regard to the number of nests, number of nests containing eggs, and also the material used in the construction of the nest.

T. S. Venugopalan
D. S. Murti's Bungalow, Near Post Office
Dhantoli, Nagpur. December 29, 1967

SUGGESTIONS FROM READERS.

With reference to your request for ideas for improving the Newsletter for Birdwatchers, may I suggest that you include a section dealing with readers' questions from readers? As you can guess, I already have questions to ask! These questions could be answered either by the Editor or other readers. For instance a bird seen by a reader in one part of India may be unknown to him, but very common in another part, and easily identified by someone living in that area.

We have recently seen two birds we are unable to identify. One of them is the pink headed bird we described to you, and the other is one we saw a few times last winter, and which we have seen again. If you think it would be a good idea to have a section devoted to readers' questions, I would be very grateful if you would please publish the descriptions which I enclose with this. I do so with the hope that someone will be able to identify them -- I find it tantalising not to be able to pin them down!

Sarah Jameson
Sanctoria, Disergarh P.O., Dist. Burdwan
W. Bengal. January 15, 1968.

Please keep sending descriptions. We shall do our best. -- Ed.]

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BIRDWATCHERS' CLUB OF INDIA

The Seventh Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers Club of India was held on Saturday, the 20th January 1968, at 5 p.m. at the residence of the Honorary Secretary, 32 Juhu Lane, Andheri. The following were present.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Mr Salim Ali | 9. Mr J. S. Serrao |
| 2. Mr R. H. Brown | 10. Mr J. C. Daniel |
| 3. Mr S. V. Nilakanta | 11. Mrs M. Choksi |
| 4. Mr V. K. Chari | 12. Mrs G. Khargawala |
| 5. Mr T. V. Rangarajan | 13. Miss M. G. Robinson |
| 6. Mrs L. Nilakanta | 14. Mr Zafar Futehally |
| 7. Miss Shama Futehally | 15. Mr T. V. Jose |
| 8. Dr Amin Tyabji | |

Dr Salim Ali was elected Chairman of the meeting.

The Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 17 December 1966 and circulated with Newsletter vol. 7(1) of January 1967 were read and confirmed.

With regard to the election of the office bearers of the Club it was felt that Capt. N. S. Tyabji and Capt. S. Bhandarkar who are obviously too busy to contribute to the Newsletter in spite of their great interest in the Club be relieved of their onerous duties for the time being. It was suggested that

Mr K. R. Sethna and Mr S. V. Nilakanta be elected in their place.

Mrs L. Nilakanta and Mr Zafar Futehally were to continue as Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Secretary respectively.

The Honorary Secretary reported that the Club had to be grateful again to Dynacraft Machine Co. Prvt Ltd., for bearing most of the expenditure of the Newsletter. If members will try and get additional subscribers and if all persons paid their dues prompt it will be a great help.

It was suggested that to save expenditure no envelopes should be used in the future and the Newsletter should be despatched only with 'waist bands'. It was also suggested that an attempt be made to get the Newsletter registered as a newspaper with the Postmaster General to save on postage. Dr Amin Tyabji kindly offered to follow up this matter.

There was a suggestion that interesting places for bird watching in various parts of the country be listed in the Newsletter so that these places could be visited by our members. The Honorary Secretary was requested to list these places from time to time Statewise in the Newsletter.

Members have been clamouring for a long time to have a list of all the members in the Newsletter. The Honorary Secretary promised to put this into effect during the current year.

One of the most looked forward to events of the Annual General Meeting is the telegram of good which invariably arrives at the right time from Mr R. S. Stewart Melliush from Madras. This year's telegram reads as follows:

SLACKNESS MADRAS REGIONAL EDITOR JUSTIFIES ELECTION REPLACEMENT
BUT OTHERWISE VOTE RE-ELECTION ALL OFFICERS EMPHATICALLY EXHORT
PAYMENT MULTIPLE SUBSCRIPTIONS MY MITE FOLLOWS. MAKE NO RADICAL
CHANGE NEWSLETTER . . . MELLUISH

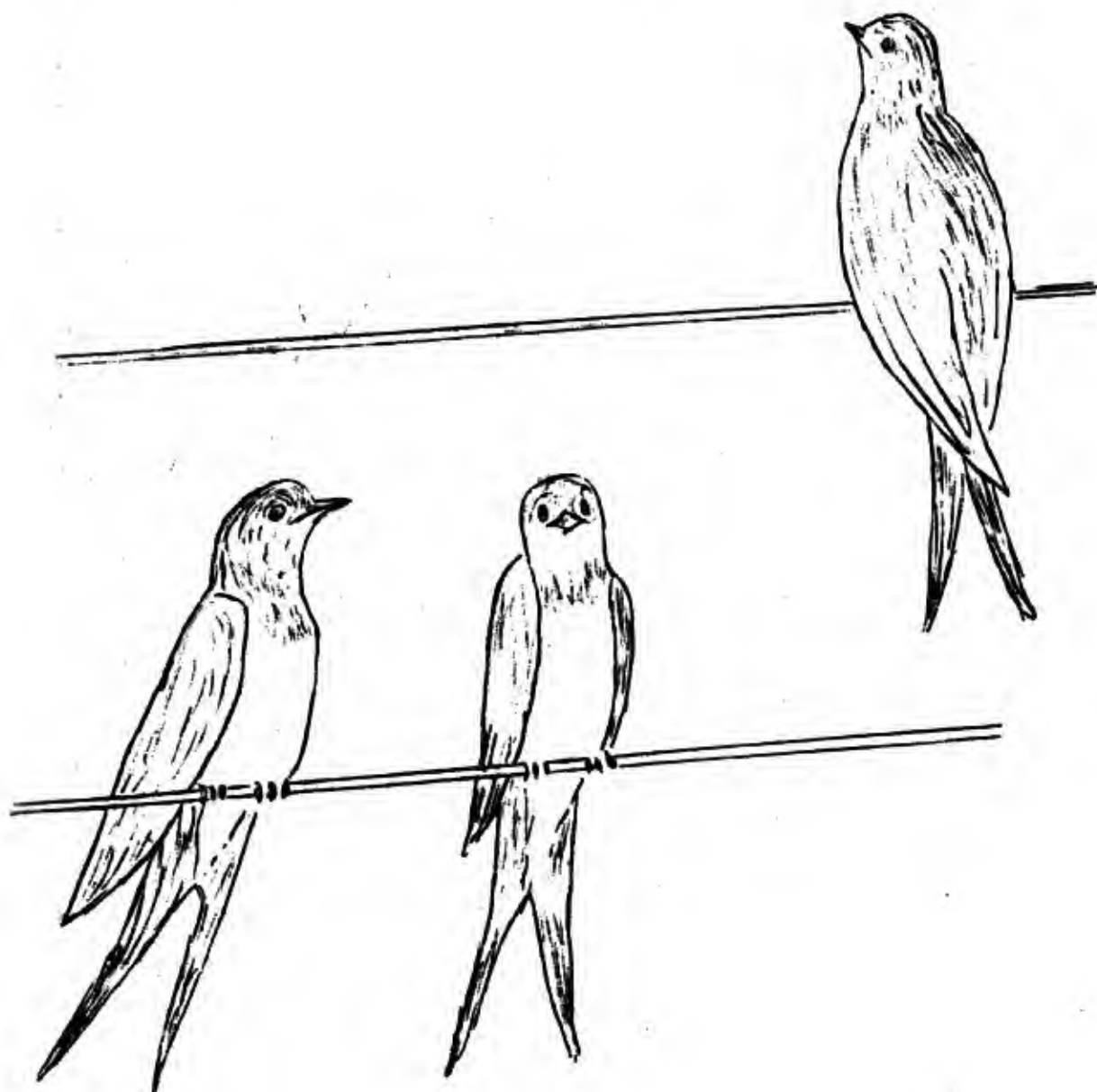
On this encouraging note the meeting terminated with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 8 March 1968



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDMATCHERS

Vol. 5, No. 3

March 1968.

CONTENTS

Blacknecked Stork (<u>Xenorhynchus asiaticus</u>) and the marriage of Mirshikars. By B. Robert Grubb & P.B. Shekar.	1
Bird-watchers' Field Club Outing. By Shama Futehally	2
Bird Watchers' Field Club of Roorkee. By Joseph George.	3
Wildfowl Survey. By Christopher Savage.	3
The Birds of the Gir Sanctuary. By Zafar Futehally	4
Correspondence: Robert L. Fleming, Sr. (p.5), R.A. Stewart Melliush (p.6), Mrs. Sarah Jameson (p. 7), Kameshwar Singh (p. 8), M. R. Ray (p. 8).	

3 BLACKNECKED STORK (XENORHYNCHUS ASIATICUS)
AND THE MARRIAGE OF MIRSHIKARS.

By

B. Robert Grubb & P.B. Shekar.

Mirshikars are a group of Muslims (see Newsletter Nov. '67: "A Week in Bharatpur" by S.P.) found in various parts of Bihar, whose occupation has been trapping birds since several generations. The abundance of birdlife, especially waterbirds, and the lack of proper enforcement of the Wildlife Rules in Bihar enabled the Mirshikars and certain others to make bird catching the occupation of their caste. Here we shall see how Loba Sarang the Blacknecked Stork had been associated with the social life of Mirshikars.

If a Mirshikar youth wanted to marry a girl, besides fulfilling all other conditions and formalities, he would have to catch an adult Blacknecked Stork, alive, single-handed and unarmed, but for his glue-and-rod device. Here let us digress a little to discuss how this device works. Several canes of about an inch in diameter and ten feet length are fittled one on top, thus making a single rod of considerable length which gradually tapers towards one end. At that end a slightly upturned and trifurcated stick is fixed, on which a kind of strong glue is applied. The man holds the other end of the rod and manoeuvres it with amazing skill towards birds sitting quite far away, on the ground. The bird would not fly away because the man is at a 'safe' distance. The bird would not know that the stick, approaching it steadily, is 'remote-controlled'. When the tip of the rod reaches the right distance the hunter gives a quick forward jerk to the rod and the glued stick fastens itself well into the feathers of the victim. The bird cannot free itself from the stick, be it a sparrow or a bird of the size of a vulture. This method is used for birds even today, and we have witnessed it.

Now let us go back to the story. On the day of marriage the bridegroom starts from his house with a party comprising of his people and those of the bride, and marches towards the place where the Loba Sarang is known to be present. The procession stops as soon as the bird is located. The bridegroom goes alone to get the bird. We may wonder why so much fuss is made for catching just a bird. However, the Blacknecked Stork is shockingly ferocious when cornered. The bird stands on its knees with partly open wings, facing the enemy and waits for a chance to plunge its bill, which is like a dagger, into

its opponent. As it is a tall and huge bird with long and agile neck, it is not very easy to catch it bare-handed.

If the bridegroom was successful in catching the bird the procession would move with him on to the bride's house and the marriage would take place. If he could not succeed on that day, the marriage would be postponed. When he finally manages to catch the bird, perhaps after several attempts, the marriage date would be fixed and the wedding would be solemnized. As it was prevalent among Muslims, they could marry more than one girl, if they desired so. But the hunting of the stork would have to be repeated each time.

This custom was stopped some forty years ago, following a tragic incident. A bridegroom set out with the people to catch the Blacknecked Stork for his marriage. He managed to fix the bird with the glue, and approached it. When he tried to catch it the worst thing happened - perhaps because of some miscalculation on his part. The bird gored his side fatally, and he died on the spot.

The above episode is true to the best of our knowledge. We got these facts from the Mirshikars and others who live in their neighbourhood.

BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB CUTING

By

Shama Futehally

On Sunday 19th February, the Club met, not as it usually does at Tulsai, but at Andheri: breakfast at our house, and then a walk through the 'meadows' behind the house to Jubu. Although the area is being rapidly built up, on this trip we saw enough that was new and interesting to make it a memorable walk.

First, Rosy Pastors: two or three of them feeding off a blossoming silk cotton tree. We got a very good view of these, they did not fly off for a long time. Then there were the wagtails, a couple of white wagtails, and some Eastern Grey. There were plenty of European swallows. On the side of the road we were following, I saw one or two Tree Pipits, merging beautifully with the background and a group of five or six Ring Plovers were startled into flight. There were many flocks of ordinary sparrows but one of them proved to consist in part of Brown Munias as well, established on barbed wire fences, taking off frequently to indulge in a short circular flight, returning to the identical spot again and again. Another discovery was one rather unusual bird, the Desert Wheatear. As far as I remember, this was perched on a stone wall and then on a boulder. There were two of them, some distance from each other. A thrilling new species, and if we had seen nothing else, they would have made the day.

Another lovely bird we saw was the Collared Bush Chat on a fence, one single male with a bright rose-orange breast, black head and back, and white patches on the neck. We had a long and excellent view of this bird rummaging among the dust for food.

Later we settled round a creek with a few small islets, reputed to be covered over completely with migrant birds sometimes; but now had only a few stray Sandpipers, one Spotted; one Little Egret, and a couple of Common Kingfishers. Then we walked along beside the creek on a dirt track, thick mangrove vegetation at the side and there were Blyth's Reed Warblers by the dozen in the bushes. Incidentally, there was a train of camel-wallahs coming along and I had a jerky ride along the road. Once we were arrested by a loud and harsh chuk-chuk from the mangrove, punctuated by scuffling and the sound of creaking twigs. Dr. Salim Ali identified this as a large Reed Warbler, uncommon in the area. But the bird, did not respond to our various eager claps and hisses, and remained hidden

That makes about fifteen inspiring species, a revealing total for this otherwise dull and stony stretch of ground.

BIRD WATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF ROORKEE

By

Joseph George

Field outings were organised once a month or oftener in 1967. The average attendance was six which we consider very encouraging for a small town like Roorkee. A rare bird seen was the Terek Sandpiper.

Five film shows on birds and other wildlife were arranged. We are now finding it difficult to get new films.

Dr. G.L. Christie, visiting Professor from Canada at the Roorkee University, addressed the Club on his impressions of the fauna and flora of India. Shri K.M. Vaid of the Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun, delivered a lecture on 'Nadriath and Valley of Flowers'.

Nestboxes installed in gardens and school premises in Roorkee were taken by the Blackheaded Myna, the Common Myna, the Roller and the Spotted Owlet.

WILDFOWL SURVEY

(Reproduced below are two letters from Christopher Savage, Honorary Coordinator, Asiatic Wildfowl Working Group).

I am very interested to read in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers that you have been counting ducks in Nagpur District. We are of course most interested.

I am sending you copies of our latest count forms and should be most grateful if you could airmail to me details of any counts made in January so that they may be included in the 1968 January Census Report. In due course I should be very glad to have details of all your counts as these will be valuable in assessing seasonal distribution and status.

Meanwhile I am putting you on our mailing list for next year.

(Letter addressed to Mr. T.S. Venugopalan).

I was very pleased to see this letter to which thereabove is a 'reply'. We are having a wonderful response to the Census this year and by all indications of a higher quality than last year.

One thing that puzzles me is that several reliable observers have reported Scaup. I cannot really accept this without further justification and I wonder if it would not be timely if you could put a notice in your splendid Newsletter to ask your readers to send in to you full details of unusual sightings supported where possible by observations by at least two other experienced observers. Scaup are very exciting as up till now they have been very rare visitors. You might add that anyone shooting a rare duck by accident should try to send in the skin for confirmed identification by the Bombay Natural History Society.

(Letter addressed to Mr. Zafar Futehally).

[Will readers kindly co-operate with Mr. Savage and heed his advice about being more than usually careful in reporting Scaups — Ed.]

THE BIRDS OF THE GIR SANCTUARY

By

Zafer Futehally

Some years ago Mr. J.K. Sen of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta, sent me a list of the birds of the Gir Forest. This consisted of 96 species plus three 'doubtfuls'. Mr. Sen was in the forest for six weeks in January-February. This list was useful during my recent visit to the Sanctuary (21-23 February) with the group sponsored by the Fauna Preservation Society, London. There were many keen bird-watchers in this group and the tour leader Sir Hugh Elliott was knowledgeable enough even about Indian birds to be able to identify several nebulous forms in the distance. During the short period devoted to bird-watching we saw over 60 species, consisting of members of many widely separated families. I will refer to a few which caused great excitement among the visitors.

We in India have got used to the Copper-smith (Megalaima haemacephala) and seldom take time to admire its elegant colouring, but our friends from temperate lands were quite overcome by the sight of this bird 'tonking' away from the top of a bare teak tree. Another delightful bird much appreciated was our Golden-backed Woodpecker (Dinopium benghalense) whose golden and scarlet colours and merry laughter enlivened the somber setting of the dry teak forest.

Birds of prey always pose special problems of identification. If they are high up in the sky in bright light their colours escape even a good pair of binoculars. If they are sub-adults their plumage is very different from that of their parents which is the one usually illustrated in the books. I have, however, been fairly familiar with the White-eyed Buzzard (Buteo teesa) and the Shikra (Accipiter badius), but both the birds would have eluded identification were it not for the presence of Sir Hugh. This Shikra in the compound of the Guest House at the Gir, had a very broad white eye-brow, and white and brown markings on the breast, very different from the finely vermiculated front of the bird in my garden. Apparently, Shikras have a very wide variation in plumage markings and there is a great difference between male and female, young and old.

The three Buzzards were high up in the air, and their beautiful and cosy acrobatics was something I had never witnessed before. I have always been under the impression that they are a lazy species, waiting endlessly on a lamp post for a cricket or a mole to pass beneath them and provide an easy meal. It was the call Pit-Teer, Pit-Teer which gave them away. There is a good description of this in Whistler's "A Popular Handbook of Indian Birds". There were three birds, and one seemed to be slightly smaller than the other two, suggesting that the three were a family unit.

I will continue this account in the next issue.

RESPONSE:

The November copy of Newsletter for Birdwatchers was of special interest because of the article by Werner, "Two Visits to Nepal." We were on home leave at the time he was here so did not have a chance to compare notes on what he saw on the trek north of Kathmandu. I would like to make a few suggestions regarding species mentioned based on our observations for the past ten or twelve years.

Mr. Werner mentioned a Black Tit at about 9,000 feet. He gave his identification as a Sikkim race only found in eastern Nepal. Hodgson's Cole Tit (Parus ater aemodius Blyth) is the more common species in that area although the Rufous-bellied Crested Tit (Parus rub. diventeris rubidiventeris Blyth) is also present. It may be the latter bird he saw.

About March 20th, the most common Leaf Warbler in the oak forests in that area is Phylloscopus pulcher pulcher Blyth. The wing bars are conspicuous. This is several weeks too early to expect P. proregulus at any height. The Greenish Warbler (P. trochiloides viridus Blyth) is on migration in March, as Werner observed. P. l. latidus Blyth. moves in to the hills mostly in April. The Yellow-rumped Leaf Warbler (P. proregulus chloronotus Gray) is numerous in that area from March onward. With at least twelve species and sub-species of Leaf Warblers moving through Kathmandu Valley in spring and fall, it is indeed difficult to keep track of them. However, Mrs. Desiree Proud has detailed records in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, Vol. 53, No.1, 1955, pp.62-64, which prove extremely helpful for us who live in Kathmandu Valley.

The data from rhododendron forests at about 8,000 feet needs a comment or two. One would expect the tree creeper at that altitude to be the Sikkim bird, Certhia discolor discolor Blyth. also in Kathmandu Valley in winter. Short-billed minivets are confined to far eastern Nepal by the Long-tailed Minivets (Pericrocotus ethologus favillaceus Bangs and Phillips) is to be expected here. The Woodpecker with a "warm orange ochre breast" would be the Eastern Rufous-bellied Woodpecker (Dendrocopos hyperythrus hyperythrus (Vigors)) rather than the Fulvous-breasted species. Of course the Himalayan Pied Woodpecker (Dendrocopos himalayensis albescens (Baker)) is only in far western Nepal but the Darjeeling Pied Woodpecker (D. darjellensis Blyth) is here.

On the succeeding paragraphs I might add that the Black Eagle (Ictinaetus malayensis (Temminck)) which we saw at close range two weeks ago appeared to have no white either above or below. In regard to flock of thrushes, the last week of March is too early for Tickell's Thrush (Turdus unicolor Tickell). Both Zoothera mollissima mollissima (Blyth) and Z. dixonii (Seeborn) breed in that area but I have never seen them in large flocks. The description suggests the Black-throated Thrush, Turdus ruficollis astrogularis Temminck, not all of which have "black" throats.

It would have been rather unusual to have run across Mrs. Gould's Sunbird (Aethopyga gouldiae (Vigors)). We have seen it once in eighteen years. The Nepal, A. nipalensis nipalensis (Hodgson) and Fire-tailed Sunbirds, A. ignicauda (Hodgson) are fairly common, however.

Finally, the identification of the White-crowned Laughing Thrush given is for the far eastern Nepal race, while the one here is Garrulax leucolophus leucolophus (Hardwick).

I might add that we have an interested group of adults in the Valley who go on birdwalks together. One has proposed we organize a "Spiny Babbler Club" with the only requisite for admission that he has seen this species. Because of frequent visitors from abroad, it is also proposed we get out a check-list for the Valley and surrounding hills. Such lists were invaluable in the United States and Britain when I was looking for birds in those countries.

Robert L. Fleming, Sr.
Shanta Bhawan,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

1 February 1965.

I was indeed sorry to miss the annual meeting of the Field Club last Saturday afternoon; it would have been most pleasurable to sit on your lawn again, and drink your tea, and renew acquaintances there. Please excuse me for not coming.

Actually I expect you will approve of the way I spent the day. My activities were in sympathy with your interests and those of our society. While you lunched, Sir, I was wading far from land in a soggy-bottomed tank surrounded by flocks of Rufous and White Ibis and Openbilled Stork. In the early afternoon, while you took your nap, I lay on my stomach in the mud squinting through a telescope. And when you were arranging chairs for your meeting and welcoming the first members to arrive I was squatting on the dry bed of the River Palar contentedly eating an idli and watching — as always, in vain — for pratincoles. I say contentedly because I had set out that morning with a specific and limited objective, and was now able to feel more or less certain that I had achieved it.

The objective was to follow up a hunch about Glossy Ibises. There appears to be a conspiracy among writers on Indian birds to deny to the south-east of the country the regular occurrence of many species which are in fact quite common visitors, and to assume that occasional vagrants are singular rarities. A good instance of the former penchant is that of the Blacktailed Godwit; 'common ... south to Bombay (Salsette), less common to very rare in the Peninsula and Ceylon' says Ripley; perhaps he got this idea from the Vernay surveyors, who put the bird firmly in square brackets and wrote, 'This species is however so rare in Central and Southern India that it cannot be included in the Presidency list until a more positive record is forthcoming'. The Bar-tailed Godwit they ignore altogether, and Ripley restricts it to 'east Pakistan, western India and Ceylon; which is precisely the same range he allows the 'himrel. Now both the Blacktailed Godwit and the Whimbrel commonly winter on the Madras coast, and the Bar-tailed Godwit is not impossibly rare (I saw a single bird last Sunday, at Pulicat). These are merely examples of what seems to be a trend in the literature of the Indian avifauna — due, probably, more to a paucity of human observers and correspondents than to any genuine lack of birds — a tendency to underestimate the quantity and variety of migrants which regularly or sporadically reach the south-eastern seaboard. This is not a thing for which the authorities should be censured; the distribution of birds is not a static phenomenon, and for want of observers they must often rely on out of date records, or make assumptions from the absence of any. But it means that on the question of the range of some species the field is wide open for fresh discoveries.

The Glossy Ibis is probably, pace Ripley, a sporadic visitor to the south. But as far as I know its only firm claim to honorary South Indian citizenship is based on three skins in the Time Collection at the British Museum (JBNHS 39: 451). 'Retted mouldering smelly dead things! It is more than eighty or ninety years, I suppose, since they dabbled with their numinous bills in the mud and preened their glistening black and green and purple and russet plumage. Have none of their posterity ever followed their doomed trail southwards since then? On the basis of reliable published records, apparently not — though there may be some post-Vernay record buried in the Journal which I have missed. I did not know this when ten days ago I saw a distant party of twenty-one 'black' ibises feeding in the shallows of Madurantakam Tank. They were unidentifiable, anyway, being up-sun and far away. I was only struck by their glossiness. I daresay the Black Ibis is just as glossy as the Glossy Ibis, but the sheen I saw gave me a hunch, and when I later read about those exanimate husks in Kensington it became all the more important to examine the Madurantakam birds again properly.

There were twenty-three birds there on the day of your meeting, and I got quite near and watched them for an hour or more through a good telescope in perfect light. I was later able to approach within a few yards of them. They had none of the characters which are diagnostic of the Black Ibis.

The birds gave no impression of nakedness, and bore no trace of red wattles. There was no white anywhere on the shoulders, and the legs appeared the same colour as the beaks — a dull greyish black. A tinge of rufous was to be seen on the feathered portions of the tibias of one or two birds, but there was no sign of the Black Ibis's brick-red legs. One bird at least was near enough for me to see faint longitudinal pale flecks on the neck, which is a feature of the non-breeding plumage of the Glossy Ibis (Henry).

It is some years since I saw a Black Ibis at close range, nesting in Gujerat, and if I made notes I've lost them. I should therefore be most grateful if any of your readers who are familiar with Black Ibis would confirm or deny that the established characters, in particular the white patch on the shoulder and the red legs, are invariably easy to spot at close quarters and are present in birds in and out of the breeding season and at all fledged ages. It is so easy to be absolutely wrong about things like this, especially when one is following a hunch.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,
R.A. Stewart Melliush.

Halloway's Cottage,
29 Cassa Major Road,
Madras 8.

24-1-1968

Would somebody please identify these two birds? I cannot find them in Whistler or Salim Ali's "The Book of Indian Birds", or "Indian Hill Birds".

1. On October 17th, we saw a bird resembling a dove sitting on a bush in an area of waste land, comprising eroded ridges of ironstone shale near Kult, West Bengal. We observed the bird through binoculars from a distance of about 70 yards, in clear afternoon sun. Its entire head and neck were a subdued pinkish brick colour. The back, wings and longish tail were brown. There seemed to be a slightly scaly effect on the wings. Eyes and bill dark, legs not seen. When it flew away to one side of us, there was a definite impression of grey blue. It was quite silent all the time we observed it.

2. We heard this bird in our garden about 6 times last winter, between October and early March, but only saw it once. We have again heard it several times this winter, and managed to see it on January 1st evening, sitting in a hibiscus hedge. It appeared to be smaller than a mynah, with a rather dumpy figure. Head, neck, back, wings and tail were dark brown, with the wings folded rather high. The wings were covered with coppery buff spots. The whole of the underside was buff, with thin dark bars running from wing to wing, all the way from the dark throat to the tail. A dark line through the eyes, running back to the wings. A slight crest on top of the head, with a dark line running through it from bill to back. The tail was barred. The bill was short, straight and very sharp and tapering. Bill and legs greyish, eyes dark. Its flight was noisy at the start like a dove's, and continued in a series of short dips. Its call sounds like "chlee" repeated rapidly seven or eight times.

Sanctoria,
Disergarh P.O.,
District Burdwan,
West Bengal.

Mrs. Sarah Jameson.

[Unfortunately the Editor cannot help]

Today I observed a small bird of the size of a sparrow on the top of a mango tree which seems to be a Verditer Flycatcher, but its colour was much deeper blue above and more slaty blue below than the picture in Salim Ali's "The Book of Indian Birds". Is the colour in the book incorrect, or did I see a different bird? The bird had no patch of white anywhere on the body or on the tail.

The Nilgiri Verditer Flycatcher has been described by Salim Ali as duller coloured, but the picture of the bird in "Indian Hill Birds" is much brighter than the picture of the Verditer Flycatcher in "The Book of Indian Birds". Can you throw some light on this?

Kameshwar Singh.

A.N.S. College,
P.O. Barh,
Dist. Patna (Bihar).
20.2.1968.

[Dr. Salim Ali will reply in the next issue — Ed.]

In the February Newsletter under the heading "Birdwatching in Andheri", you have mentioned the call of Blyth's Reed Warbler (Acrocephalus dumetorum). I could not find any description of it in Salim Ali's "The Book of Indian Birds". In the Synopsis by Ripley, only distribution in India during winter is given. I would like to have a short description, so that I may be able to identify it more accurately. I have heard as well as seen the bird, but I am not so sure.

MA/4
Hirakud.

M. R. Ray

15.2.1968.

[You will find a description of this bird in Hugh Whistler's
"A Popular Handbook of Indian Birds" — Ed.]

=====

THIS NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED EVERY MONTH.

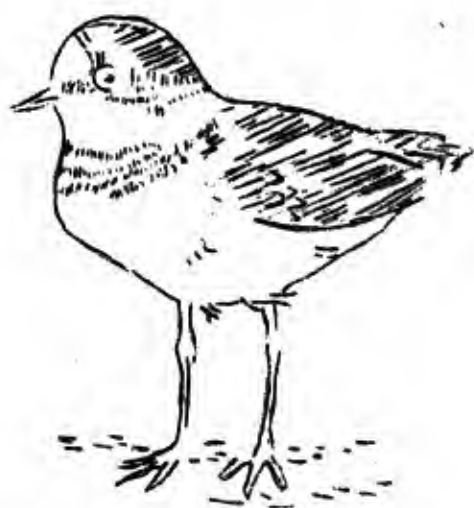
SUBSCRIPTION RATE: Rs.5/- PER YEAR.

=====

Zafar Futehally,
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers,
32-A, Juhu Lane,
Andheri,
BOMBAY 58-AS.

Newsletter

FOR BIRDWATCHERS



Volume 8 Number 4

APRIL 1938.

NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 8, No.4

April 1968.

CONTENTS

Bird-watching at Dalhousie with comments. By A. Navarro, S.J.	.....	1
Some Common Birds. By Jamal Ara	.....	4
Birds and us. By K.S. Lavkumar.	.....	6
Tedanthangal Bird Sanctuary - Nesting Cormorants and Common Myna. By (author unknown)	.....	7
A bush tragedy. By S.N. Sen Gupta	.....	8
Notes & News Correspondence:-	.....	8
1) The Mellowishian Cuckoo. By Gift Siromoney	.....	9
2) Visit to Sambhar Lake area for Flamingos in November. By R.N. Mukherjee	.....	9

BIRD-WATCHING AT DALHOUSIE WITH COMMENTS

By

A. Navarro, S.J.

Following the school tradition of organising a bird-watching expedition during the October holidays we chose Dalhousie for this year.

Dalhousie is a small, picturesque and peaceful hill-station at 6,000 feet altitude with hotels and villas scattered at different heights all along the slopes of the mountains. On the day of our arrival our most important task was to find a guide with a knowledge of the roads and forest tracks, as also of the fauna of the locality, capable of understanding the purpose of our activities. Thanks to the efforts of the hotel-owners we found an ideal guide in the person of a certain Sitaram who had all the qualities we looked for. Most of the guides and Shikaris on the hill-stations know very few English names of birds, and as there is a lot of confusion in the regional names, we often find that the same bird has different names in the same locality. A quick solution to the problem lay in the use of visual aids. Hence we brought with us a few books with plenty of pictures, and made the guide go through them and point out which birds were to be found in the locality. Our guide was so taken by the books that on our return from our rounds he used to spend a good deal of time looking at the pictures; often he used to pass very informative remarks as to the season of the year when some birds could be seen or the spots where other birds were frequent visitors.

On the first day, early in the morning we heard the raucous calls of the Himalayan Jungle Crows, coming from their roosting resorts and gathering in small bands around buildings and markets, full of eagerness to begin their daily chores; next the Common Myna made its appearance, and at the same time we could hear the Eucalyptus-headed Parakeets which were flying in small noisy

flocks from tree to tree in search of food. These two birds, the Common Myna and the Blossom-headed Parakeets, were found in the neighbourhood of buildings and gardens, and we seldom met them in heavily forested areas. Yet the Slat-headed Parakeets were often seen in forests, and occasionally in gardens on the outskirts of villages.

With them was one of the commonest birds, the Whistling Thrush. We observed that these Thrushes were so attached to buildings and isolated constructions, that the presence of Whistling Thrushes in the more remote parts of the forest was a guarantee of the presence of some kind of construction near at hand. Moreover, each pair was always seen in the same locality.

The Western Yellow-billed Magpie was seen everywhere, in any kind of forest or at any altitude, often in pairs; however, on several occasions we came across small flocks of four or six birds hunting together. The Himalayan Jays were found on the same terrain and under identical conditions as the Yellow-billed Magpies.

The Himalayan Tree-Pie was seen only on a few occasions. Several times at the same spots, late in the evenings, at sunset we observed large mixed parties of small birds moving rather fast in an uphill direction; most of them were Tits and Warblers. We all know how difficult it is on these occasions to classify the birds correctly. In spite of this I am certain that the Indian Gray Tit, the Crested Black Tit and the Yellow Cheek Tit were present. Three species of Warblers could be identified - the Yellow-Browed Warbler, the Pallé's Leaf Warbler and the Simla Leaf Warbler, though there were other Warblers that escaped detection. The White-tailed Nuthatches and the Himalayan Tree-Creepers were seen mixed with the parties of Tits and Warblers, suggesting that the Nuthatches and Tree-Creepers were not actually following the trail of the others, but had been accidentally caught in the uphill direction of Tits and Warblers. The same flocks were seen in the morning on their way down-hill in small mixed parties, and slowly moving from tree to tree and bush to bush in search of seeds and insects. The Nuthatches were more often seen in small groups and the Tree-Creepers in pairs.

The Black-throated Jay was very abundant, moving in small noisy parties, for some reason often associated with Yellow-bellied Magpies and Himalayan Jays, but by preference in mixed vegetation, keeping aloof from the Rhododendron and Fir Forest. At the tops of large trees on a few occasions we saw small noisy flocks of Black Bulbuls; on a single occasion we sighted a group of Orange-bellied Chloropsis, and occasionally we observed the presence of Racket-tailed Drongos.

From the first day of our rounds we met large flocks of cheerful Short-billed Minivets moving gracefully from tree to tree. Since the birds had finished moulting, they were looking their best in colourful red and yellow; in the same forest we noticed the presence of small flocks of little Minivets.

On the fourth day of our stay at Dalhousie there was a sudden and abrupt change of weather. At noon the sky became cloudy and windy; but in spite of the stormy weather, we decided to go for our evening rounds as usual. We observed neither sound nor movement anywhere; on the same day late in the evening a hail storm fell over Dalhousie, followed by heavy rain that lasted for more than twenty-four hours, with a heavy snowfall around Dalhousie hills.

The morning of the sixth day brought some relief; the weather returned to normal and by noon the rains had ceased. That evening we went out again on our rounds, and found that not only was the sky clear, but the forest was full of life, sound and movement. We came to the conclusion that birds are sensitive to weather changes, and the weather factor may have a great influence on the erratic movements of the bird population of an area. Two days later we discovered that the large flocks of Short-billed Minivets had completely disappeared from the forest. Nevertheless the little Minivets apparently were not affected greatly by the storm as they could be seen moving about in small parties as if nothing had happened.

In large patches of deciduous forest with abundant undergrowth we found

the Eastern and Western Variegated Laughing Thrushes. The Eastern race has the outerwebs of the primaries and tail feathers of slate blue; in the Western race, the colour of the outerwebs and tail feathers is yellow. It may be rare that the two races meet together on the same grounds. I have therefore given the characteristic description of the two races, based on the colour pattern of the outerwebs of the primaries and tail feathers. The fact of finding the two races in the same locality may prove that one of the races is a migrant to the locality. They were seen associated with other Thrushes, Jays and Warblers. In the same locality on more than one occasion we found small flocks of Blackthroated Thrushes; they were seen on low trees and bushes searching for food, apparently feeding on seeds and berries. With these Thrushes we noticed a few White-Cheeked Bulbuls. On the canopy of large trees we noticed the Fire-Breasted Flower Pecker and the Bluethroated Parbet.

Amongst the boulders and large stones along the streams running through the forest we often saw pairs of White-capped Redstarts, Plumbeous Redstarts and Western Spotted Forktails. Owing to the gradient of the hills it was extremely difficult to move up and down the streams; yet I consider it well worth the trouble we took to watch at short range the gaiety and elegant movements of the Spotted Forktails moving along the edges of the streams in search of aquatic insects and larvae. Along the same streams we found often the Common Indian Kingfisher; but the Whitebreasted Kingfisher was seen only below 6,000 feet. In spite of the Great Himalayan Parbet being one of the most common birds, during the day it was difficult to locate it, as most of the time it was sitting motionless among heavy foliage; but late in the evening as the light was fading away, these birds used to gather in large numbers flying in an upward direction to where they would roost for the night in a well secluded corner of the forest among heavy foliage. In the day time they were very silent, but late in the evening they became noisy; as they retired to the roosting place it appeared as if each individual was welcomed with a riot of *re-hu-me-hu* from the birds already there; this was audible from afar. Most of the birds were still in heavy moult.

The Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush was seen sometimes at the topmost branches of the Rhododendron trees perched upright, at times quite silent, at other times uttering loud calls which could be heard from afar. Once we saw a single Sooty Flycatcher. We watched for some time how he used suddenly to dart to the ground for insects and fly back to the spot where he had perched before, like a sentinel on his observation post. The Striated Laughing Thrush is found throughout the Himalayan ranges; we could see them everywhere, amongst heavy foliage moving in small restless parties rather close to the ground. In their *modus vivendi* they resemble the Seven Sisters.

On two occasions we saw the Indian Black-Naped Woodpecker - a rather difficult bird to locate in spite of its large size because its dark-green colour pattern makes it almost invisible amongst dense forest where the dark green shades predominate. Quite often we came across the Himalayan Pied Woodpecker, and once we sighted the Himalayan Yellow-Naped Woodpecker.

Flocks of Rock Pigeons were seen flying from hill to hill; on the out-skirts of the forest near cultivated terraces we found the Northern Turtle Dove. In the deeper interior, we saw the Rufous Turtle Dove. The Common Kite was confined to the neighbourhood of villages. Only once did we see a Sparrow Hawk; on some occasions we noticed a small group of Indian Long-billed Vultures.

Deep in the forest, we observed several flocks of Black and Yellow *Parakeets*, most of the time feeding on the ground. We noticed that the male birds were more numerous than the females. It appeared as if they did not easily associate with other birds. We never met them on the Rhododendron or on any of the Fir trees. They were still in heavy moult.

On several occasions we noticed large flocks of birds of different sizes in group formation passing through; but owing to poor visibility on account of the cloudy sky which persisted for some days after the storm, it was not possible to identify them; when sometimes the flocks flew lower, we detected

then to be Starlings.

We came across three varieties of Pheasants, the Kalij, the Koklas and the Trogopan, the Kalij being the most common. In the Chandright area late in the evening we saw them in large numbers flying to their roosting grounds. On two occasions in the same spot we noticed about eight birds roosting together; owing to insufficient light we could not distinguish the sexes but apparently there were more females than males. The Koklas were seen always above 5,000 feet; on two occasions we were fortunate to have a glimpse of the Trogopan. Below 6,500 feet we noticed the Kukar in small parties near the edge of the forest.

We visited Chamba, the old capital of Chamba State, where there is a museum with a collection of birds from that locality. There we checked our notes and observations, and found that they tallied with the museum collection.

The stormy weather was certainly most unfavourable for accurate bird-watching; besides, owing to the lack of proper conveyance, our activities were confined to Dalhousie only - that is from 5,600 to 8,000 feet, to the top of Kalatop Sanctuary and Daina Kund. Following the ideas of leading ornithologists that the study of the ecology of a locality will reveal the variety of bird life that it can support, let us say a word about the ecology of Dalhousie. Most of the higher forest was made up of Rhododendron the lower forest of large patches of Fir, with now and then a Rhododendron and a Fir for variety. An exception was the hillside facing the Himalayan ranges down to Dalhousie valley known as Chandright. This latter area is well forested, with a great variety of large and middle-sized trees, including Rhododendrons and Firs, but in scanty numbers, with a heavy undergrowth of ferns, grasses and creepers - a real type of biome for passerine birds; this was the best area for bird-watching, where the bird life was the busiest the most varied and colourful.

The three main factors of the ecology of Dalhousie are the vegetation, the altitude and the streams. The last factor is responsible for the presence of Redstarts, Forktails and Kingfishers. The altitude factor seems to be of least importance, as most of the birds mentioned could be found at any of the altitudes within this area. The fact that bird life was diminishing as we climbed higher is evident that the vegetation factor is more important. It is well-known that forested areas with few varieties of trees and scanty undergrowth are not favourable for a large and varied bird population, for the reason that the time and season for food production is limited to a fixed part of the year. This is known as the limiting factor.

An aerial view of the topography of Dalhousie and its surroundings from the Kalatop Sanctuary revealed another factor, doubtless the most important and responsible for the present fauna of Dalhousie. I shall call it the isolating factor. From the Kalatop side facing the highest Himalayan ranges down to the valley of Chandright there are a series of esculated mountains devoid of any kind of forest except for patches of scanty vegetation. The Dalhousie forest is therefore like an island keeping in mind that the large colourful bird population along the Himalayan ranges consists mostly of forest birds, when large or small areas are isolated from the well-forested areas, they will have a fauna that is adapted itself to the ecological conditions of an isolated area.

SOE COMMON BIRDS

By

Jamal Ara

If you are asked to name the commonest bird of the country you will probably select the crow, but there are several places where the crow does not

There are two kinds of crows - one the house crow with a grey neck, and the other the jungle crow, which is bigger and black all over. In forested areas or in villages adjoining forests the house crow is rare, and the jungle crow also is not common.

Of the same family as the crows is the tree-pie, which is rusty brown in colour, has a very long tail with black and silver bands, and altogether looks very pretty. Its call can be rendered "Motri-motri", and that has given it its Hindi name. Even though its numbers are less than those of the crow, from another point of view it is more common, in that it is found almost everywhere: in gardens, groves, forests, villages. It has no special affinity for water and does not live on streams, swamps, etc., but if there is any tree cover about the tree-pie is sure to be found eating insects. It is not of much use to the farmer, but it is of great value to the fruit grower, since it mainly consumes insects from trees and only infrequently from food crops.

It has one bad habit - it belongs to the same family as the crows - it sucks the eggs of other birds and thus prevents them from multiplying. Even this, however, may be useful from another angle: it may help to maintain the delicate balance of nature. Nature provides a safe-guard against the uncontrolled multiplication of any species. Raptors, hawks, crows and the tree-pie control the multiplication of both beneficial and non-beneficial birds.

As far as the harmful birds are concerned, the beneficial role of these destroyers is evident. But it might be thought that the destruction of useful species is a loss to man. Nature has arranged things in such a way, however, that if man does not destroy useful birds, no special damage is caused by the birds of prey. Matters are so managed by nature that the very birds which help crops by destroying insect pests do not become so numerous as to be a pest themselves.

The intricacies of this balance of nature are not evident to a casual glance. A deep study is necessary, where it will be seen that nature has adopted many means to serve its ends. Birds play an important role in these. It is, therefore, instructive to study these arrangements and avifauna simultaneously.

The type of terrain dictates the means adopted. Depending on the topography the flora alters, and along with the flora the insect fauna, and all three affect the type of birds occurring. The study of birds is best done at their places of residence. This becomes more evident if a walk is taken on the sand-banks or riverine tracts of the Ganga or any other big river.

After the crows, the mynas come next in numbers. The common myna - with which you are doubtless acquainted - is found almost everywhere, be it forest, cultivation, hill or dale, village or waste; but it is not found on sandbanks or riverine tracts. In such places the bank myna occurs, which is slightly different. The bank myna is bluish-grey, but its wings are ashy, as if like a mendicant it had sprinkled its body over with ash; and the naked skin round the eyes is red. There is also another myna with a pied appearance, known as the pied myna. It should not be confused with the hill myna, which is almost entirely black and is found in forested tracts. It is often captured from the hills and brought to the plains for sale. It does not belong to the same family as the other mynas. With training it becomes an excellent mimic. Amongst the true mynas none is a good mimic, but the pied myna has a good, long whistle.

The difference between the common and bank mynas is due to their different environments. The common myna nests and roosts mostly in trees, though it feeds mostly on the ground; but because there are no trees on sand banks, the bank myna excavates a tunnel up to five feet deep and breeds inside it. Often a number of these tunnels are interconnected. Just as ants have under-ground colonies, so do bank mynas. Each nest can be

visualised as a house, and the intercommunicating tunnels as roads.

During the last war large numbers of people used to take shelter in London in the tunnels of the underground railways. Similarly the bank myna breeds in tunnels to avoid the attacks of birds of prey, particularly of kestrels and shikras, who can be seen performing acrobatics above any sandbank. They generally fly low over the ground in search of prey, just like any intruder aircraft. They balance themselves against the wind in such a way as to be able to hover over a spot for a while.

The shikra and the kestrel are so coloured that viewed from below they merge into the sky. Ignorant birds thus cannot perceive them hovering and become easy victims. But Nature has provided a safeguard against this as well. The bank myna, owing to the absence of trees, has to sit mostly on the ground, and when so seated is rendered almost invisible by the similarity of its coloration with its environment. If it remains motionless it is invisible to its enemies. Such colouring is known as "protective colouring"; it ensures the safety of the bird, and is governed by the habitat which the bird frequents.

The schemes of protective colouring are very interesting. On riverine and other cultivation are found partridges and quails, which fly very little. Their plumage is very similar to the ground pattern, being brown with splashes of black. They depend on their protective colouring for safety. Unless flushed they are almost impossible to see even when closely approached in the fields in which they are taking cover. The partridge and the quail are big birds, but small birds use the same device. The larks and the pipits are small birds, found in fallow land and riverine tracts, and owing to their small size are helpless against birds of prey; but they look like clods of earth and so escape detection. The skylark is a good songster, and has been lauded for this by poets. It is true that it is very easy to hear this bird, but it is exceedingly difficult to see it.

Protective colouring is not confined to birds dwelling on the ground but also occurs in arboreal ones. A small bird, the Chloropsis, found in forested tracts, is completely arboreal, and has emerald green plumage. It is very difficult to distinguish from the foliage of the trees amongst which it flits. Like the leaf of a tree its plumage is darker above and lighter below.

Protective colouring is useful not only for protection. The green colour of Chloropsis helps it in getting its food also, because insects, which are its main food, mistake it for a leaf. The chloropsis to heighten the illusion produces a whistle, and when insects move on hearing this whistle, it captures them.

BIRDS AND US

By

K. S. Iyer.

By birds, I mean the birds of India and quite understandably the US are the people of India. It is a significant feature of the long relationship between the human race and the birds in this subcontinent that we have a long history of mutual understanding and that certain forms of birdlife have of late started becoming scarce is due not so much to our direct onslaught onto our feathered neighbours but more so as a result of the very factors which by their destruction are making our own lives difficult. The careless exploitation of India's Flora has been the main reason in the retreat of many bird forms all over the country. Birds and Man have in India lived very closely through the ages and nowhere except possibly in Tibet has there developed so much mutual trust. Indian birds are remarkably confiding and even hunted Frankolins, and Bustards are not so much pressurised by direct destruction as has been by careless and ignorant exploitation of our vegetation. I feel that this basic fact must be understood and before it is too late for the birds

and for us, steps must be taken to educate a rational attitude towards plants. Except then for active preservation of a few larger and numerically few birds and animals, we in this country should turn our attention towards the proper utilisation of land.

Flying last December from Rajkot to Bombay, I was dismayed to note the extensive areas of Saurashtra which are no better than waste lands. As much as a quarter, if not more of the countryside was barren earth, the topsoil washed away and at most places gaunt rocks emerged. Not a blade of good grass could grow on this sort of strata even if it rained well yearly. The few brave plants which are still struggling are efficiently and quite understandably cropped up by hungry sheep, goats and cattle. Man is busy with the sickle and the axe to demolish the few poor trees or shrubs still existing. Even the reed beds are cut as soon as they sprout. Where can the birds and mammals hide, breed and on what can they feed?

The rapid erosion during heavy monsoon showers makes rivers torrents of chocolate coloured water. A single hour of flooding brings inches of sediment from adjoining fields and from what little covers the wastelands styled in Government parlance as grazinglands!

This silt chokes the river pools which in earlier years remained filled even in worse droughts and so now the rain water rushes with unimpeded speed to the sea, little staying to nourish the roots of trees or seeping down to replenish the lowering subsoil water. Each subsequent year the summer droughts become a bit more severe for even these trees protected on private lands. These veterans are ultimately succumbing and dying.

With the drying of water pools, aquatic life is imperilled and birds like Kingfishers, Terns, etc. are all getting very much scarcer than they were a few years ago.

With depletion of shelter and feeding areas, quite obviously, animals are not going to flourish and even if not shot or killed their numbers will gradually decline.

Now, then, is the time to start building up actively an enlightened programme in soil management, and plans on a State level need to be drawn up to stop the devastation. Unpopular steps must be taken to preserve the soil and the vegetation. This will save the animals and in turn will save mankind.

Why cannot we think of making our country a show place where human beings are in happy harmony with nature? Birds will enter our gardens, mammals will be our neighbours. Once again India will bloom into a big, scented garden a "Nandan Van" and "Eden".

VEDANTHANGAL BIRD SANCTUARY - NESTING CORMORANTS AND COMMON MYNAS

(Author unknown)

Karunguli hillock, the tank, the tank's shady bank, homeward peasants and cattle, the green of the patterned fields, and the blue of the sky form a typical rural landscape; and the four hundred and odd Eurycotis pattoniana trees standing neck deep in water with "winged leaves" are but a part of the landscape!

By 3.30 p.m. the mantle of shadows spreads over the water though some tree tops are still bright; fanthorns and down fruits and flowers float along the rippled edge of water. Little Cormorants (Phalacrocorax niger) were collecting nesting materials; one bird flew straight to a dead branch of an Acacia arabica, held it between its beak, flapped the wings to break the branch and flew back. Another dived into the water, emerged out after two minutes, with a dripping branch (or nose?), flapped awkwardly at the surface

of the water and probably flew toward the colony of nests. The Little Cormorants seemed to outnumber other species and some trees are almost exclusively occupied by them; it was not possible to locate nests of birds that were collecting building materials. I was watching that evening (3.11.66) and the next morning and Little Cormorants gathered the nesting materials either by fishing out from the water or from the trees on the bank where as some white Ibises were bringing sticks from far off.

Some Common Mynas were flying into the colony by 6.40 p.m. They were about ten in number and they did not return. By 9.20 a.m. some were flying out of the colony. Probably they stayed the night in the colony. It would be interesting to know whether these Mynas nest there and how they get along with the water birds.

A BIRD TRAGEDY

by

S. N. Sanyal.

In the fine winter morning of 12 December 1967, at about 0745 hours when I was bathing myself in the rising sun stepping on the balcony of my house facing a fallow land with scrubby outgrowth I was startled by a screeching call radiating from there. Soon I could spot the back portion of a female Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) quivering her wings in great pain and agony. Hearing this alarm note a large number of house crows soon appeared in the scene and went on screaming Kow, Kow looking at the ground some by perching on the boughs of a nearby mango tree and others by flying over the area in a circle. A minute later I found the Koel disappeared in the bush. Soon after a Mongoose came out of the bush agitatedly and ran a few feet away then turned its direction to re-enter the place of its emergence. After a little while the Mongoose came out of the hiding and tugged the Koel which was still struggling for life as its faint dying squeal could still be heard. Bewildered by the constant Kowing of the crows the Mongoose left the prey unconcoiled in the field and slunk away in the bush. After a brief pause it moved to approach the dying quarry but again turned away a few feet from the morsel. After that the Mongoose stood upright on its hind legs for a minute or so probably to make a critical survey of the area and after sensing no danger that might befall on it, quickly but nervously pounced on the victim, which had by then died, and tugged it away by its sharp teeth for quite awhile.

NOTES AND NEWS

Editorial Problems:-

In the last issue of the Newsletter a slip was inserted stating that the article "Two Visits to Nepal" in Vol. 7, No. 11 of November 1967 ascribed to Luis Werner was not in fact written by him. The actual author has not yet revealed himself and we again appeal to him to acknowledge his contribution.

In the present issue the article "Vodanthangal Bird Sanctuary - Nesting Cormorants and Common Mynas" is unsigned and in this case too the author is requested to write to the editor.

In future, will contributors kindly sign and give their address at the bottom of the articles.

When the Newsletter was first started J.S. Serrao, the Editorial Assistant of the Bombay Natural History Society, kindly undertook to strike the stencils and did his job very conscientiously. Subsequently, Serrao could not find time to assist us and a number of stenographers from Dynacraft and

elsewhere have assisted in the work. The steno who is used to write letters in connection with conveying equipment finds it difficult to follow the rules of ornithology and does not see the importance of spelling the generic name with a capital and the specific name with a small letter. The editor should, of course, check the stencils before being released for cyclostyling, but if he spent any more time on production of the Newsletter, then he actually does he would lose his job and the Newsletter a good patron. Readers will, therefore, forgive such mistakes in spelling etc. which continue to appear in this Newsletter. Also suggestions for replacement of the editor will always be most welcome.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Mallikian Cuckoo:

In the February ('68) issue of the Newsletter, a letter of Mr. Stewart Balluish (dated February '67) was reproduced with a diagram of an unidentified cuckoo. It closely resembles a bird which I have often seen here in Tambaram -- not far from Madras. The Indian Plaintive Cuckoo, in contrast to the Baybanded Cuckoo goes through two or three phases before it gets the adult plumage. The female which is dimorphic, is chestnut in one phase and becomes slaty grey in the other. These birds arrive in Tambaram in September and some of them stay on till April. Many just pass through on their way to Ceylon. Most of these birds are in the slaty grey phase but one or two chestnut birds are also regularly seen.

Some are found in the intermediate stage when they are getting transformed from chestnut to grey and one of these might have been seen by Mr. Balluish. In the last week of February I saw a Plaintive Cuckoo in this intermediate chestnut and slaty grey phase picking hairy caterpillars. These Cuckoos visit us regularly every year and they seem to like the scrub jungle and the open spaces of the Madras Christian College Campus.

Madras Christian College,
Tambaram.

Gift Sircemoney

February 28, 1968.

Visit to Sambhar Lake Area for Flamingoes in November:

During our visit for a fifteen days at Sambhar Lake, we used the trolley of Hindusthan Salt Co. The trolley tracks extended upto sluice gate of main canal of salt pans to the lake.

Small crustacean, artemias etc. are in bulk in the water all around, which are known as good for flamingoes.

Moreover, I got a chance to examine a number of water samples of that lake and nearby areas. Algal filaments are observed which are identified as *Cyrtophyceae* but the species is not confirmed.

Most probably flamingoes are coming to the Sambhar Lake area from Gujarat and the Rann of Kutch. Overcome at the sight of flamingoes at Sambhar Lake my pen fails to express how moved I was on seeing numerous flamingoes at a time at one place. So I cannot check myself from informing this to others who have not seen this yet.

R.N. Mukherjee

Zoological Survey of India,
Calcutta,

Newsletter

FOR BIRDWATCHERS



Volume 8 Number 5.

MAY 1968.

NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 8, No. 5

May 1968

CONTENTS

Bird Ringing at Mahableshwar during April 1968. By Jamshed Panday, Robert Gruth, P. B. Shekhar, and V. Udaya Shankar Rao	1
The changing pattern of Bird Population in a garden. Usha Ganguli ...	3
The Case of the Indian Grey Junglefowl. By Salim Ali	5
The Billigirirangan Hills: Some Common Birds. By K. R. Sethna	6
Myth's Reed Warbler v. Tailor Bird. By J. S. Serrao	7
Notes and Comments	8

Correspondence:

1. Birdwatching at Rambag. By D. K. Bhatt (p. 8); Bird life around Tulsi Lake area. By Amin Tyabji (p. 8); A colour phase of the Paradise Flycatcher. By T. V. Jose (p. 8); Random notes: Curiosity among birds; Feeding habits of Redvented Bulbul; Bird life in Nainital. By Lt. Col. A. David (p. 9). Behaviour of a crow. T. V. Baddeley (p. 9); Bird behaviour. By M. K. Himmatsinhji (p. 10); Birdwatching at Nal Sarovar. By R. M. Shukla (p. 10); Arrival of the Golden Oriole in Roorkee. By Prof. Dinesh Mohan (p. 10)

BIRD RINGING AT MAHABLESHWAR DURING APRIL 1968

By

Jamshed Panday, Robert Gruth, P. B. Shekhar and V. Udaya
Shankar Rao

The area around the popular hill station of Mahableshwar nestling in the Western Ghats at an elevation of c. 1500 m. is a birdwatchers' 'El Dorado'. Receiving a heavy annual rainfall of 300 inches, the hills are clothed with a luxuriant growth of evergreen forest which supports an abundance and variety of bird life.

The Bombay Natural History Society's Bird Migration Study Project, with the inspiration and guidance of Dr Salim Ali undertook bird ringing in this region from March 26 to April 22, 1968. The first three authors carried out the entire operations while the fourth and Sri J. C. Daniel were associated with them for a few days. A total number of 851 birds of 41 species were ringed and released. They were captured with the help of nylon 'mist' nets set up at various suitable spots in the jungle. After examination for ecto-parasites (ticks, lice, etc.) a minute droplet of blood is taken (without the least pain to the bird) on a slide. The wing length and weight are measured after which a marked aluminium ring of proper size is attached to the bird's leg. The recoveries of the ringed birds would add substantially to our knowledge of the migratory and local movements of these birds, and their ages.

In the following are noted some of our observations which we hope will be useful to people who visit this hill station in summer. Apart from Dr Salim

Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS and INDIAN HILL BIRDS, his THE BIRDS OF TRAVANCORE AND COCHIN is an invaluable guide although Mahableshwar lies well outside the region dealt with in this book. It will also enable one to note the not unlikely occurrence of some species previously thought to be confined to the southern section of the Western Ghats and associated hills.

BABBLERS

The Spotted Babbler, the Deccan Scimitar Babbler and the Quaker Babbler were common. Shy birds all, their presence was revealed by their lovely songs and call notes. The breeding season of the Quaker Babbler seemed to be in its last phase as evidenced by the number of young birds caught and by the beautiful cup-shaped nests evidently in use till recently. The Spotted Babbler and the Deccan Scimitar Babbler were also found to be breeding. The noisy Jungle Babbler and the diminutive Whitethroated Babbler were also caught in smaller numbers.

BULBULS

The Redwhiskered, the Yellowbrowed and the Black Bulbuls are very common and keep the forest alive even through the hot mid-day hours with their joyous notes. All three species were breeding and a nest of the Redwhiskered Bulbul with warm eggs was found. The Yellowbrowed Bulbul was noted to utter a peculiar nasal, conversational call in addition to its well-known double whistle note. The Redvented Bulbul was entirely absent although it outnumbered the other members of the family at Pandharpur, a much drier locality (rainfall 60 in.) only 10 miles west of Mahableshwar.

FLYCATCHERS

This family was well represented by the Blackrumped Blue Flycatcher, the Paradise Flycatcher, the Whitebellied Blue Flycatcher and less commonly by Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. A single Whitebreasted Flycatcher was ringed on 2nd April after which one was caught or seen. Presumably it was one of the last individuals to depart to its northern breeding grounds.

The Paradise Flycatchers were of the migrant race leucogaster. The young immature male of this race differs from that of the race paradisi resident in the Peninsula, in having the white of the lower parts extending straight up to the black of the throat without any intervening light ashy grey area on the breast. They were caught up to April 14, after which they appeared to have departed to their northern summer quarters.

One of the highlights of this programme has been the confirmation of the extension of the northern limit of the range of the Whitebellied Blue Flycatcher. Previously thought to occur in the Ghats forests south of Belgaum, its range was however extended northward by 250 miles to Rhinashankar by Dr Salim Ali in 1951. It was found to be fairly common at Mahableshwar which is slightly to the south of Rhinashankar. The other race of this species occurs only in Burma and eastward, thus leaving a gap of more than 1500 miles between the ranges of these two races!

The beautiful Blackrumped Blue (or Monarch) Flycatcher was probably the commonest member of this family. It was interesting to find a few individuals of Tickell's Blue Flycatcher which is more at home in lightly wooded deciduous country.

WARBLERS

Curiously enough, the Greenish Willow-Warbler was caught as late as April 21, a day before the camp was wound up. Evidently it is somewhat loath to leave its winter quarters! It would now have to perform its long journey northward in arduous hint and over sun-scorched plains.

THRUSHES and CHATS

The Hill Chat and the Blushheaded Rock Thrush also seemed to be rather late

: 3 :

The throaty chuck-chuck-chuck of the Blackcapped Blackbird was rarely out of earshot. A disused but beautiful nest of the Malabar Whistling Thrush was observed on a protected shelf in a vertical rock face very near the bird-ringers' ' office '. Although the country seemed to be the ideal habitat for the Shama, none were seen, although it is quite common at Matheran, but the Magpie-Robin was present instead. However, it should be noted that the Shama has not been recorded above an altitude of 1000 metres in India.

The Tree Pipit, Hodgson's Tree Pipit and the Gray Wagtail, all migrants, were seen throughout the duration of the camp and so was the Common Rosefinch.

Although the Small Sunbird was quite plentiful, the small number caught in the nets was quite mystifying till one of us (J. P.) observed that upon making the slightest contact with the net they would fly back in ' reverse gear ' and avoid getting trapped. Also their tiny size enabled them to fly, very often, right through the mesh.

The Small Green Barbet was abundant and noisy and kept up its pukkrō, pukkrō calls from day break to dusk. One bird was seen to chisel out a nest hole in a tree right above our ' office '. The Large Green Barbet common in the wooded low country was completely absent.

The Jungle Nightjar kept up the sonic activity at night with its incessant chuck-chuck-chuck resembling in frequency and tone the sound of a small oil engine.

The Nilgiri Wood Pigeon was fairly common and the fruits of Randia appeared to be popular with it. One Greyfronted Green Pigeon was caught though it was hardly ever seen on the hill.

The Shikra was the only bird of prey to be caught in the nets, probably while in hot chase of its quarry. From the ' points ' affording glorious views of the wooded valleys, could be seen the Black Eagle soaring above the tree-tops and recognised when seen from above by a conspicuous white patch on the base of the tail, and also the Kestrel and the Alpine Swift. The Crested Serpent Eagle was seen and heard.

The gallinaceous birds were represented by the Grey Junglefowl and the Red Spurfowl each of which was seen with chicks on one occasion.

Notable absences (not seen by us at any rate) were the Common House Crow, the Common Myna and the House Sparrow! It would be interesting to watch whether the House Crow would follow the tourist rush slightly later in the year.

THE CHANGING PATTERN OF BIRD POPULATION IN A GARDEN

By

Usha Ganguli

Since we moved into our present residence, I have been wondering what constitutes the bird population of a garden, or for that matter a farmland, a forest or any given area. The population varies from season to season, month to month, also from morning to roosting time.

Our residence has a large compound of 2 acres, with an extensive shrubbery and a few large trees. We moved in at the peak of spring, on March 31, 1967. The garden was resounding with the calls of Bulbuls, Robblers, Sunbirds, Coppersmiths, Green Barbets, Mynas, White-eyes, and many others. Soon their numbers were swelled by passage migrants such as Blyth's Reed Warbler, Olivaceous Warbler and Rosey Pastors, followed by the summer migrants -- Koel and Golden Oriole. It was also the time of departure for Redstarts and Wrynecks. Through summer and the monsoon season the residents -- at least three pairs of Redvented Bulbuls, a pair of Redwhiskered Bulbul, 2 or 3 pairs of Mynas, 2 or 3 pairs of Indian Robins, Ring Doves and Little Brown

Doves, Rock and Green Pigeons, Jungle Babblers, Ashy Wren Warblers and Tailor Birds, Crows and Sparrows and a pair of Golden Orioles nested in our garden. Except for the Green Pigeons all the others succeeded in raising a few young ones including a young Pied Crested Cuckoo fostered by Jungle Babblers and young Koels fostered by Crows. Mortality in eggs and young was very high and Bulbuls, White-eyes, Ashy Wren Warblers, Tailor Birds and Doves. Even the Mynas lost two young to my dog who also mauled two young crows that fell out of their nest. Several birds which did not nest -- or the nests of which I did not find in our garden brought their chicks to our garden for foraging. These were young Hoopoe, Sunbird, Large Grey Babbler, Coppersmith, White-throated Munia, Magpie Robin, Bee-eater, Crow Pheasant, Brahmini Myna, Green Parakeet, King Crow and Baybacked Shrike. The last two came on their own, unaccompanied by adults. The young King Crow repeatedly chased the Bee-eater.

By the end of August nesting had virtually ceased except for an odd nest of a Bulbul, Tailor Bird, Ashy Wren Warbler or Babbler. The doves continued till October and I saw a pair of Rock Pigeons mating on 1st January. By August the Rosy Pastor, Hlyth's Reed Warbler and Greenish Willow Warbler were passing through, this time from their breeding grounds.

September and October were months full of 'promise': the resident birds, both adult and young, were still about the garden in satisfactory numbers and the winter migrants, Redstart, Lesser Whitethroat, Hume's Leaf Warbler and Wryneck had arrived. Some of the passage migrants were passing through in waves, staying for a few weeks before their journey farther south. The Koel, Pied Crested Cuckoo and Golden Oriole, our summer migrants left by the first week of October. A young Pied Crested Cuckoo was seen with its foster parents, the Jungle Babblers, only in the last days of that month. How it found its way back to its wintering grounds is anybody's guess. Two to four White Wagtails have been visiting our lawns almost daily since the beginning of October. A solitary Grey Wagtail had paid several visits between October and November, but I do not know if it was the same bird. We had a visit from a Whitebrowed Fantailed Flycatcher one day. It is resident locally, and this was probably a young one. Most of the Redbreasted Flycatchers pass through Delhi, a few remaining behind in winter. So a few of them paid short visits in late October and November. I had three visits in October and November from two Large Cuckoo-Shrike, birds rarely seen in Delhi.

By November the Hoopoes had left our garden altogether; the Sunbirds had dispersed, so had the majority of Bulbuls and Indian Robins. Redstarts were few and in the garden, far between. The several pairs of Mynas which nested mainly in creepers and had brought their young to our lawns had now dwindled to a single pair of which one had an injured wing. Every evening several pairs flew over our house to some communal roost. Brahmini Mynas also went to forage elsewhere but returned in the evening to roost in a Neem tree in our garden.

December and January were strangely silent months. A pair of Mynas, a solitary Redstart, the skulking movements of an Ashy Wren Warbler or Tailor Bird, the quick run of a furtive Indian Robin, the irregular appearance of a few Bee-eaters, the occasional call of a pair of Redvented Bulbuls, a solitary young Sunbird bereft of the left foot -- these were all the indication of a few birds seen in a large garden. The presence of the White Wagtails on our lawns was particularly welcome.

February was a comparatively cold month, but the sudden change in the bird population and behaviour pattern was very marked indeed. On February 9, two Large Grey Babblers scolded me in no uncertain manner when I approached a particular corner of the shrubbery, soon I saw a third babbler emerge from behind a bush, its bill full of dried roots for its nest. The nest was fairly high up on a Jacaranda tree. An iridescent male Sunbird proclaimed its territory with its challenging call while flitting from tree to tree, and on February 18, I saw the female carrying dry leaves to its nest which it had started working on only recently. By the first week of February, Coppersmiths, Larkets and the two kinds of doves had started calling. The triple hoot of the Hoopoe was heard for the first time after the 15th of that month. The courtship flights of the doves were noticed on the 18th.

February. At least 3 male Indian Robins were displaying. The Brahmini Mynas and Common Mynas had returned to forage.

Today is the 24th March and the cycle is complete; the garden is again full of bird song. I must make it clear that by 'bird population' I mean the roosting as well as the breeding population. At the height of winter I counted 206 Rock Pigeons roosting in one of the Neem trees. Most of them came from long distances, so did a large number of Crows that roosted in a Neem tree and a mango tree. 30 Brahmini Mynas that foraged elsewhere shared their roost with the pigeons. Of the 25 or 30 Bee-eaters that roosted in different trees for short periods not more than 6 or 7 were seen hunting at any time of the year. A Rufous-backed Shrike roosted in the garden but hunted elsewhere. The foraging population varying from month to month afford a chance to study feeding behaviour, the kinds of food consumed by different birds etc. It is this population that posed some problems for me. Why did Brahmini Mynas, Hoopoes, most of the Sunbirds, White-eyes and many others leave the garden in winter? The shrubbery and the lawns apparently still attracted insects, since Wagtails, Lesser Whitethroats, Hume's Leaf Warbler, Chiffchaffs and Jungle Babblers regularly found food. What type of insect does the Hoopoe feed on in winter outside a garden or a park? Some one reported that the Lodi Golf Grounds which was full of Hoopoes was suddenly deserted en masse in December and January.

THE CASE OF THE INDIAN GREY JUNGLEFOWL

By

Salim Ali

[We reproduce here, with permission, Dr Salim Ali's note on the Indian Grey Junglefowl, published in the Asian Newsletter of the International Council for Bird Preservation.]

The Grey Junglefowl, *Gallus sonneratii*, is an endemic Indian species confined chiefly to the western side of the Peninsula. It inhabits both hill and plains country, being most partial to wooded foothills in moist-deciduous biotope -- especially mixed bamboo jungle, the neighbourhood of forest villages and cultivation, and abandoned scrub-overgrown clearings for rubber, tea and coffee. It is an attractive game bird and offers excellent sport with the gun over dogs or when beaten out of its coverts. The neck-hackles of the cock, spangled with curious waxy blobs or spots of a golden yellow colour, have long enjoyed popularity in the U.K. and U.S.A. for the manufacture of artificial flies for trout fishing, but in recent years the demand for the feathers has risen to onerous proportions from the viewpoint of the bird's preservation. Under normal circumstances the protection afforded by the Wild Animals and Birds Protection Act 1902 (~~xxxxxxx1902~~) would have been adequate since under that Act no wild bird feathers or skins can be exported from India except for scientific purposes and only to recognised scientific institutions. However, since the Grey Junglefowl was abundant enough in the wild state an understanding seems to have been reached between the Government of India and the governments of the U.K. and U.S.A. before World War II to permit quotas for a fixed number of skins (or 'capas' of the cocks) to be imported annually into those countries on a commercial basis. The quota fixed for the U.K. (on what considerations it is not known) was 4250 skins (or 'capas' ?) per annum, and that for the U.S.A. at 5000 skins.

Owing to the lucrative prices obtainable for the capas in the U.S.A. (as high as 6 to 10 dollars a piece) smuggling on a large scale soon became rampant. Unscrupulous businessmen hired gangs of jungle people to snare or kill junglecocks and turn in the skins for a pittance, and smuggled these out of the country by parcel post under a false declaration of the contents as 'Sample of no Commercial Value', or as to their place of origin. These skins or capas were first smuggled across the land frontier into Nepal or Pakistan or Goa. To circumvent the quotas further, the feathers were often declared as those of domestic fowls -- an uncontrolled exportable item -- and which in any case few Customs officials were competent enough to distinguish from wild ones. Another ruse of the smugglers, at the U.K. end, is to try and pass off

smuggled feathers of wild junglecocks as locally farm-produced. At our instance the British Section of the ICBP recently arranged a survey by the Ornamental Pheasant Trust of Great Britain to determine the extent to which Grey Junglecock feathers could in fact be supplied by game farms in England as some dealers claimed. The survey proved that in the entire U.K. the number of this species living in aviaries was only of the order of some 500 birds; therefore totally inadequate for meeting even a small fraction of the U.K. demand. In the case of the U.S.A. it is perhaps possible that a small proportion of the feathers available are genuinely farm-produced since game-farming is more in vogue in that country and there is a deliberate move to breed the birds in aviaries for the purpose. Given proper conditions the Grey Junglefowl breeds freely in captivity, but even so it is doubtless more economical to import wild feathers while they can be had. However, it is hoped that with the complete stoppage of exports from India breeders would pay greater attention to develop the industry and make the U.S. self-sufficient in the matter of these feathers.

All in all it has become increasingly evident that smuggling junglecock feathers is a sufficiently lucrative undertaking to lure unscrupulous traders to run the comparatively small risk of being caught. That the demand for these feathers has been on the increase in recent years even in the U.K. (where they have been less popular than in U.S.A.), is clear from the fact that whereas in 1959 only 2200 Grey Junglecock capes were lawfully imported against the permitted quota of 4250, and only 1600 up till November 1960, 3290 skins were imported in 1965, while up till November 1966 -- with two months still to go -- the quantity imported was already 4178 skins, thus very likely to exceed the full lawful quota. What the total of the illicit impost must be, it is difficult to gauge. This upward trend poses a serious threat to the species since its wild populations cannot stand the growing pressure indefinitely. The evil effects are already apparent in certain districts where the numbers have become markedly reduced; thus protective action could no longer be delayed. At the request of the Indian National Section, the British Section of the ICBP kindly took up the matter and in 1966 represented to their Board of Trade that no further licenses be issued despite the quota, for the import of these feathers into the U.K. At our further request they are now trying to urge the authorities to prohibit the import of Grey Junglefowl skins or feathers altogether since their export from the home country is statutorily prohibited. Only such reciprocal action can help to effectively plug the loopholes for illegal exports via countries like Nepal and Pakistan, where actually the species does not occur at all. Through the good offices of the U.S. National Section efforts are also being made to invoke the Lacey Act and thus effect complete prohibition of the import of these feathers into that country. While it is perhaps overoptimistic to expect quick results, there is no doubt that these measures, if properly implemented, will help considerably in reducing the illegal trade and thus relieve the pressure on the wild populations of this interesting, ornamental, and typically Indian species which is in jeopardy -- again entirely due to human greed and vandalism.

THE BILLIGIRIRANGAN HILLS: SOME COMMON BIRDS

By

K. R. Sethna

The Billigirirangan range of hills lie to the south of Mysore. The southern portion of these hills, which runs from north to south, is the area I will be referring to.

is/

The central portion/densely covered with forests which become lighter the lower one goes. The higher slopes have some rather nice grassland. There is a village called Punjur at the bottom of the southern end of these hills and from Punjur there is only one road which runs up the hill to Bedaguli -- 13 miles. There are about 1400 acres of coffee planted from Bedaguli down from a height of about 4000 feet right up to Attikan and nearly as high as 6000 ft. .

The beautiful forests around are unfortunately being ruined by large areas being felled and planted up with Eucalyptus. In spite of this, there is a large number and variety of birdlife around here.

Driving up to Badaguli from Punjur, one seldom fails to see a number of Gre Junglefowl or the Red Spurfowl along the sides of the road. The commonest bird around here however appears to be the Jungle Babbler and one cannot fail to see it almost everywhere.

Among the other birds commonly seen in the coffee estates and the surrounding forests are the Indian Grackle, the Common Myna, the Green Barbet which incidentally does a certain amount of damage to coffee berries when they are ripe; the Goldenbacked Woodpeckers are plentiful and so are the Indian Tree pie, the King Crow, the Backet-tailed Drongo, the Nilgiri Whistling Thrush, the Whitecheeked Bulbul, the Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon or the Imperial Pigeon, the Golden and the Blackheaded Orioles, the large Indian Parakeet, Spotted Dove the Indian Pitta, the Hoopoe, the Nightjar and the Crow Pheasant. The beautiful Paradise Flycatcher and the pretty little Scarlet Minivets are seen some times.

Among birds of prey, the Shikra is quite common and one can nearly always see Kestrels on the higher grasslands, hovering in one spot waiting for the unsuspecting lizard or field mouse. The Black Eagle, soaring just above the tree-tops with a watchful eye on the ground below, is a magnificent sight. One also often sees the Crested Serpent Eagle soaring high above and its call so well described in Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, is often heard.

I have, in the winter, seen Woodcock in the ravines higher up, but they are not easy to see unless one knows specifically where to look for them.

The birds mentioned here are only a few of the many in these hills. There are some I have not identified and others I have not mentioned here but hope to do so sometime later on.

Unfortunately the large areas of these forests being planted with Eucalyptus can only have a detrimental effect on bird and animal life in these lovely hills, and one often wonders when the Forest Department and others responsible for these plantings will wake up to the fact they do far more harm than good in the long run.

ELYTH'S REED WARBLER V. TAILOR BIRD

By

J. S. Serrao

From about mid February the tack, tsck, tsck of a Elyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*) was audible as it hunted about in Dr Sâlim Ali's garden at Pali Hill. But on 4th March at noon I was attracted by its peculiar churr...tack, churr...tsck, churr...tack, churr...tsck. On scanning the direction of the cry one was seen engaged in aggressively demonstrating at a Tailor Bird on a horizontal branch of a mango in the garden. The pattern of demonstration went thus: From the top of a stump on the horizontal branch the Reed Warbler would fly down to the branch with a churr and proceed with 2 or 3 hops to within a 12 inches of the Tailor Bird; thence uttering the tack fly back to the stump-top whence it had flown down to commence the churr cycle once again. For a few minutes, the Tailor Bird could neither be intimidated to yield its ground on the branch, nor be breezed up to come to grips with the demonstrator. It stood alert facing the Reed Warbler but stayed put where it was. This resulted in the continuous churr...tack darts of the Reed Warbler from and to the stump-top. The inconclusive demonstration came to a close when they were disturbed as I walked my way under the branch.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Since the Editor is away this month attending the International Union for Conservation of Nature Conference at Morges, Switzerland, this issue will again be ~~edited~~ by Shama Putehally.

CORRESPONDENCE

Birdwatching at Rambag

We have received this reply to our request for permission to stay in the Rambag Guest-house for members of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India.

' With reference to your note dt. 21st instant, I have to inform you that there is no objection in giving the permission to the members of the Birdwatchers' Club of India to visit Rambag provided they do not disturb the place and would be careful with the property. They will also be allowed to use the house for a day or two, if required.'

D. K. Bhatt
24 Feb. 1968

Bird life around Tulsei Lake area

This is to inform you that we visited the Tulsei Lake area early this morning. I went especially to inspect the spot where the new hutments, about which I reported previously, were, and found to my satisfaction that they had been removed and that the tree-cutting activities had died down. There was only a large tin shed some distance away under the pipe-line and it evidently belongs to the Public Works people. Round about here the undergrowth had been set fire to and burned off. The ground was bare and black.

On the main road to Aarey Market we saw, as our car approached, a young brood of partridges scuttling away off the highway into the undergrowth. The kingfishers were very abundant and their strident calls resounded in the forest. The blackheaded oriole displayed the full glory of its nuptial plumage. There were babblers, barbets, sunbirds, flowerpeckers and tailor birds, common and redwhiskered, but no whitecheeked bulbuls. I was lucky to see Tickell's Blue Flycatcher in a bush on the shores of Vihar Lake. An interesting drama was the sight of two tree-pies attacking a jungle crow sitting in a palm tree and eventually succeeded in dislodging it. At the lake itself there were not many birds. We saw a few plovers on the mudflats and a number of cormorants sunning themselves with outstretched wings, and plovers were inspecting the mudflats for titbits. A heron was standing slumped in the shallows. Palm Swifts and Swallows were conspicuous by their absence. Curiously we saw only one drongo, and there were no hornbills like last time, nor did any deer show themselves.

Amin Tyabji
16 April 1968

A colour phase of the Paradise Flycatcher

Except for its whitish wing-coverts, the Paradise Flycatcher (Terpsiphone paradisi) I observed in our compound at Trichur on 20.iii.1968 had as usual drab white underparts, black head and neck, and chestnut-red above. Two tail feathers of the bird appeared longer by an inch or so than their companions on either side. Is it a case of transition of the chestnut to white plumes, that a male bird is supposed to acquire at the time of maturity?

T. V. Jose

[In transition, some birds are parti-coloured for some time till they finally moult into the adult white plumage. — Editor]

Random notesCuriosity among birds

In a recent shooting trip near Ajmer I sat on a well about 200 yards from the edge of water, which was half a mile by 500 yds in dimension. There were about 100 Pintails, a few dozen teals and shovellers, some widgeons, gadwalls and spotbills. It was about 9 a.m. A solitary Barheaded Goose turned up, 'honking' away for all it was worth, and circled round and round the wheel a few times. Then it settled down in one corner far away from me. It sat there, wary and suspicious, giving its alarm honks from time to time and continuously watching me, as an unwanted addition in the topography. I also kept a watch on it amusedly. This drama went on for about half an hour and then it suddenly took flight with a loud konk. Then perhaps its curiosity got the better of its instinct of preservation, and it took a turn and came straight towards me to find out what this unusual addition was: and that unfortunately proved its undoing. The Barhead, generally, is a very shy and wary bird and takes no chances with either men or beast but here curiosity killed the goose.

Feeding habits of the Redvented Bulbul

We normally take lunch on our lawn in the garden under an umbrella and I have a habit of feeding the birds that cluster round at that hour. Among them are a batch of Common Babblers, a pair of Redstarts, a pair of Bush-chats, a dozen sparrows, a solitary robin, 4 mynas, and 6 Redvented Bulbuls. The last ones are our favourites. I have been feeding them with all kinds of things -- bread, chapaties, rice, pakoras, fruits, papars, carrots, radish, and other vegetables and incidentally cooked meat. I know bulbuls eat insects but I have never known them eating meat before.

Bird life in Nainital

Last summer we were at Nainital and among the birds that I observed there were the beautiful white-eyes, two kinds of flycatchers, a pair of rollers, jungle crows, some hill rufous, roseringed parakeets and of course the slopy but melodious Malabar Whistling Thrush or the kustura which filled the valley with its songs early mornings. There were three of them sharing the compound with us, a mother and two chicks, and they could be seen ungainly hopping along, picking insects all through the day.

It Col. A David
4 March 1968

Behaviour of a crow

In early June last a great raffish untidy-feathered Jungle Crow (Illustration No. 2 at top of Plate 1 in 1964 edition of THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS) attached himself to me. The head of my bed came close to a closed window and he would tap hard on the window to waken me at 6.30. If the window were open he would sit on the top and scream at me until I stopped reading and got bread and cream for him. He had a terrific loud kar, kar, kar (not caw but kar). If the window was closed he would tap loudly on it and go up to the sky-lights to look down on me. With an open window he would come inside and shout at my small dog. By August he had introduced a smaller, apparently voiceless member of the family. They came for food three times a day and a little meat or cheese was like; orange or sweet lime was also liked, but papaya was not.

Now this entertaining fellow has disappeared. Not gradually but abruptly in one day.

Once before he disappeared for 7-8 days when I believe he followed the Parsees to Poona -- the rain was too heavy. But only once!

Can you tell me please: Is it usual for these crows to leave Bombay at this time of the year?

T. V. Baddeley
5 April 1968

There could be other reasons for the disappearance of the crow temporarily. Nothing to suggest that he follows the Parsees! As far as I know they do not move seasonally. -- Salim Ali

Bird Behaviour

Our knowledge of the habits and pattern of behaviour even of common birds in India is very limited. Apart from the experts, amateur birdwatchers and enthusiasts can also make valuable contributions towards our knowledge by adding facts about bird habits hitherto not known. However, observations should naturally be exact, authentic and as detailed as possible. I have been reading the Newsletter with great interest and in the April issue (Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 5) the following comments in the article, SOME COMMON BIRDS by Jamal Ara, were rather interesting: 'The common myna nests and roosts mostly in trees ...' The author of the article concerned must have observed the Common Mynas' nesting activities and if so, it would be very helpful if the readers of the Newsletter were enlightened further on this subject in greater detail such as the locations commonly used by mynas for nesting on trees, i.e. the height at which nests are built, the site commonly used and the size and shape of the nest along with the description of the building materials commonly used.

M. K. Hirnatsinhji
6 April 1968

Birdwatching at Nal Sarovar

I visited Nal Sarovar on three occasions during this season, first on 24th December 1967, then on 25th February and again on 14th March.

Nal Sarovar, which is 40 miles from Ahmedabad, is one of the finest spots for seeing our migratory ducks and other birds.

I am not going into details of all the birds I saw, but I would like to invite attention to one rare visitor which I saw during my December visit. It was the Snaw.

Because Salim Ali's book does not mention the snaw as our winter visitor, and as I had no other seasoned birdwatcher accompanying me, I was greatly confused when I saw about a dozen snaw in Nal Sarovar, and on that day I could not be sure of their identity. On my second visit I happened to spend some time at the Guest House on Nal Sarovar and on the walls thereof there are pictures of many winter visitors spotted at that place. I found the snaw was mentioned as a rare visitor.

B. M. Shukla
9 April 1968

Arrival of the Golden Oriole in Roorkee

The Golden Oriole is distinguished by its sweet call and colourful plumage. Its arrival in Roorkee has been noted to be between 7th and 9th April over the past few years. I would like to know if the arrival dates of this magnificent bird are as definite and marked in other parts of the country also.

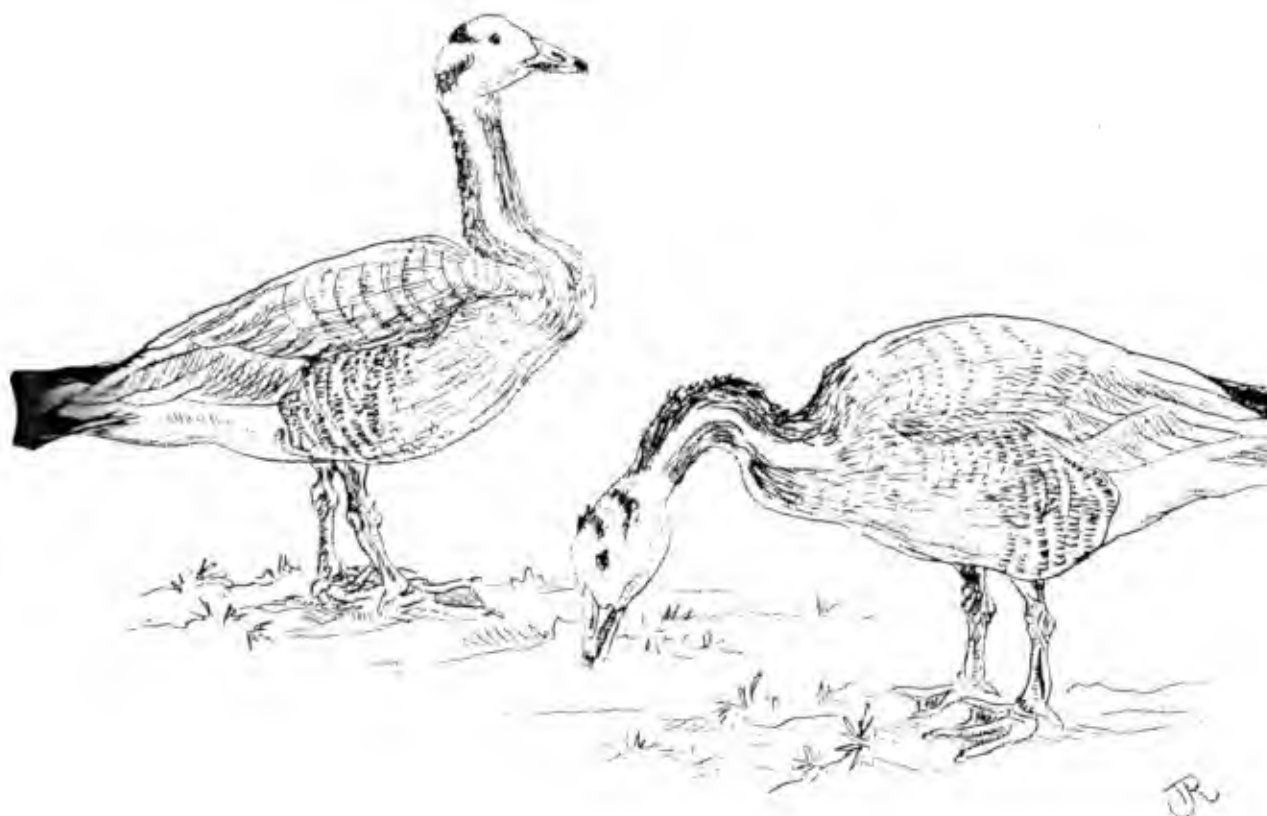
Prof. Dinesh Mohan
April 1968

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32-A Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 54-AS

NEWSLET

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 8 No. 6



Cover by - T.J. Roberts.

On enquiry, Shri R. N. Yadav, Supervisor of Jaipur Zoo later informed me that he had seen mating in peacocks in the big enclosure for deer at the Jaipur Zoo during June. The males have full grown tails and train at that time. Eggs are laid in July-August on the ground in a little depression, and according to him each clutch is of 4-6 eggs, which hatch in about 32 days.

Since the demand for peacocks from other countries and from other zoos in the country itself is increasing, we have been collecting eggs of pea-hens either to send them away or to get them hatched by domestic hens in the Jaipur Zoo.

Moultling takes place during November to January and the new feathers start coming in Feb.-March.

I have seen the males segregating in groups of 7 to 10 in the same area on 4th April 1968. But it is interesting that due to winter showers, when the Divisional Forest Officer, Bharatpur (Shri V. S. Saxena) and myself were inspecting this sanctuary on 23 March 1968 we saw two males dancing close to each other with two females nearby. This confirms what the Hindi songs on romance and rainy season mention regarding the association of the peacocks call and his dancing with the clouds and rains.

Incidentally prior to my observing the mating of peacocks, I had received a letter from Shri C. M. Chaudhri, I. P. S. (Retd.) from 464, Beharipur, Bareilly (U. P.) asking for some information on mating of peacocks. He wrote: 'A friend of mine recently wrote to me about the behaviour of certain birds. Amongst others, he asked about the mating of peafowls... It is stated in our books (Hindi) that peafowls do not mate like other birds. Then how are the eggs fertilized? I wrote to Dr Salim Ali about it. In his reply he said: "No special dispensation has been bestowed by Heaven on peafowls and they of course mate in the normal way of birds." I should have thought the big unwieldy tails of the male bird would make the mating of peafowls in the normal way of birds a physical impossibility. Perhaps the mating is done when the cock bird is tailless or when it has a small tail. Dr Salim Ali says in his BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS that the breeding season is from January to October.... I believe the egg-laying in Orissa is about March-April-May, in U. P. in June-July, in Rajasthan still later.... In Rajasthan the peacocks had their new tails by November and that they shed their tails from March to May. Last year I was at Jodhpur during August-September... A peahen laid 4 eggs in the pumpkin field in August and 3 chicks were hatched in early September... If any of you have observed the mating of peafowls I shall be glad to know when the mating takes place in Rajasthan...'

WHITECAPPED WHEATEAR (*Saxicola picata*)*

By

Jalsingh Rao.

I was on my way to Marayan Sarovar by bus from Bhuj on 22 December 1967. It was my first visit to Kutch. That Kutch is a barren, treeless and arid district is generally the impression of people who have never visited it. I was not an exception. It was therefore a pleasant surprise to have that impression reversed to a considerable extent.

The journey by bus in the last days of December was exhilarating. The weather was crisp and pleasant and the bus was not crowded.

Immediately after the bus left the stand of a small village named Manjal, I saw a Whitecapped Wheatear. Though it was a 'first' for me, and seen briefly from a moving bus, I could identify it immediately.

After my return to Morvi, I went out for birdwatching on 20 January 1968 downstream of the Muehhu. Near the crematorium a pied bird caught my attention from afar. I might have casually dismissed it as a Pied Chat, but instead had a look through my binoculars, whereon the bird revealed its true identity. It turned out to be a Whitecapped Wheatear again a second time. It was hawking insects among the boulders and 'samudhis'. It kept to that locality for a fairly long time. As a result I could observe it at leisure.

*Formerly considered a separate species (*capistrata*), 6
now established to be only a variant form of this.

On returning from Kutch to Morvi, I referred to the BIRDS OF SAURASHTRA by Dr. Salim Ali was not available, I could not be sure whether the White-crowned Wheatear has been recorded from Kutch earlier. I then reported the matter to K. S. Jaykumar, President of our Rajkot Birdwatchers' Club.

Formerly, I had come across Pied Wheatear with traces of white on their crowns, but the birds seen in Kutch and in Morvi had white crowns, and there was no mistaking their identity.

BIRDWATCHING AREAS NEAR BOMBAY

By

S. R. Shah

There are a few good birdwatching areas remaining around Bombay, but as a hiker cum birdwatcher I intend to describe two of these for the benefit of persons looking out for likely places.

Kakuli Lake

It is about 1½ miles from Ambernath station on the Central Railway. From the station the Ambernath Shiv temple is three-quarters of a mile. The temple is more than 600 years old and has many excellent carved images. From the temple a waterpipe line and a series of telegraph poles lead straight to the lake. There is an old rest house devoid of any furniture or other furnishings, overlooking the lake. Reservation is easy, since no one visits this spot. The hill Tawali, i.e. the one next to Haji Malang, forms the backdrop. Half a mile's walk from the lake takes you to the sparsely wooded slopes of Tawali and this is a good birdwatching area.

We have often visited this place during the breaks in the morning. The slopes leading to the lake is covered with green grass, carpeted with stunted trees.

In the past we have seen icoras and munias breeding on this stretch. Pipits, larks, orioles and a number of other species have been sighted. This is also a good picnic spot, some distance away.

Karnala

Karnala, near Panvel on the way to Poona, has recently been declared a bird sanctuary by the Government of Maharashtra. The Birdwatchers' Field Club of India visited it on 10 March this year. Thanks to Bombax malabaricum, Erythra indica, Rutea frondosa, etc. being in full bloom, quite a number of birds intruded themselves on our notice. We began the day with joms. Dabblers, chloropsis, shama, robins, flycatchers, shrikes, minivets, woodpeckers, barbs, kingfishers, cuckoos, pipits, etc. gave glimpses to some and full view to many. Our total tally came to fifty species. Though none was lucky enough to spot the Ashy Minivet, many of us added two or three firsts to their respective lists.

Now that we are initiated into this lovely spot we are sure to visit it often.

EXTRACTS FROM N. S. C. BULLETIN, VOL. VI, NO. 2
(March-April 1968)

Large Green Bee-eater

We saw the Large Green Bee-eaters departing on their return migration for the last time, on the 1st of April 1968.

SUNBIRD

The Purple Sunbirds are quite noticeable during these two months. We also saw males in the Black Phase. From our observations it does not appear that

they have a particular season for breeding, even locally. We found males in 'nuptial' plumage at different times of the year.

Booted Warbler

The Booted Warbler used to be a regular visitor to our backyard through-out its stay here in winter during the previous years. During the last two seasons, however, the bird (as per our observation) did not visit our backyard so often. This is probably due to the disappearance of a considerable proportion of the vegetation of the place.

This time during the early days of its stay it could be seen in the backyard now and then. We do not remember to have noticed the bird at all in February this year. In the second week of March, however, the bird reappeared. During that month we even heard one singing. The bird must have left the neighbourhood sometime in April.

Koel

On the 21st of March 1968 we were greatly surprised to hear a Koel calling at 10.45 p.m. What could the bird be doing at that late hour!

We often heard crows (both jungle crows and common crows) calling on moonlit nights. We wonder if this habit of the crows had anything to do with the koel's wakefulness that night. Perhaps the koel was camping in the neighbourhood in order to follow the preparations of the crows for their breeding.

V. Ravi
President, Nature Study Club
Vallabhajosyula House, Kottapet
Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. 14 May 1968

CORRESPONDENCE

'Behaviour of a Crow'

The article 'Behaviour of a Crow' in your Newsletter Vol. 8(5) makes very interesting reading, but I was amused to read that the crow is supposed to follow the Parsis to Poona. I wonder what makes Mr Baddeley think so? Did the crow come back after going with the Parsis? We hope to hear more about it.

P. Edalji
Woodlands, 1 Rankishore Road
Civil Lines, Delhi

Billigirirangans

Thank you very much for the Newsletter with Sethna's article in it re the birds of the Billigirirangans; which I was very pleased to read. It is good to know that a lover of wild life is on our beloved hills. The cutting out of the large areas of deciduous forest on those beautiful hills, and planting up with eucalyptus, is tragic. I heard all about it from my cousin, John, of Badaguli Estate. The inevitable result has been a serious decrease in the fauna, especially bison and the few sambar that were left.

Col. R. C. Morris
Poys, Popham, Winchester, Hants.
England

Index for Newsletter for Birdwatchers

To make up for my apparent idleness, I am sending you the first few pages of an Index I have been preparing (to help me refer to back numbers of the Newsletter). I shall complete the thing in a month or two and send the remaining pages in one lot.

K. K. Neelakantan
'Kalyan', Uppalam Lane, Trivandrum
Kerala

I wish "apparent idleness" was always so productive. -Ed.

Assam Trip:

Our Assam trip was a great success on the whole, though we had no casualty - Miss Bennette who got a nasty gash on the leg when two elephants collided in a moment of confusion when a herd of 60 wild elephants suddenly appeared close by. She had to be stitched and left behind to recover but will I hope reach Delhi in time for the homeward flight but it is very bad luck on her. This happened to the other party so you will no doubt hear all the details from Daniel who coped very well with a difficult situation.

My bird list grows apace and I have now satisfactorily identified over 200 species including some very nice ones in the forests of the Hutan border. I could willingly spend weeks there bird watching though the Manas Camp is still very primitive (but good enough to sleep in!). I was also especially pleased to have my first ever acquaintance with Rubythroats - of both species - but in the grasslands and scattered forest, a bird I have been wanting to see for years. As usual I am left with half a dozen or so species which I cannot yet identify but hope to work out in time. Kaziranga was a particularly fine area for birds of prey, though I also greatly enjoyed seeing the rhino which are certainly almost as numerous as in the best of the East African localities of the old days. I reckoned that I saw at least 25 different animals.

Sir Hugh F.I. Elliott.

(Sir Hugh led a party of the Fauna Preservation Society, London, to our Sanctuaries in February. -Ed.)

EDITORIAL AMENDS:

(i) The article "Two Visits to Nepal" in the November '67 issue of the Newsletter was written by Richard Waller. Readers will recall that it was erroneously ascribed to Luis Werner. We had the pleasure of a visit from Mr. Waller recently. He was for many years with the FAO in East Pakistan and before that in India and has now gone back to teaching in England. His present address is:

Thornworthy,
Chagford,
Devon, U.K.

It is cheering to learn that there are a few people in Europe and England, and also in the U.S.A. who want to keep in touch with Indian birds through the Newsletter.

(ii) The article entitled "Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary" which appeared in the April 1968 issue of the Newsletter was written by Mr. J.M. Johnson of the Forest School, Vaigai Tam.

Z.F.

=====

Zafer Futehally,
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32-A Juhu Lane, Andheri, BOMBAY 58-AS.

I N D E X

NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

By

K. K. Neelakantan

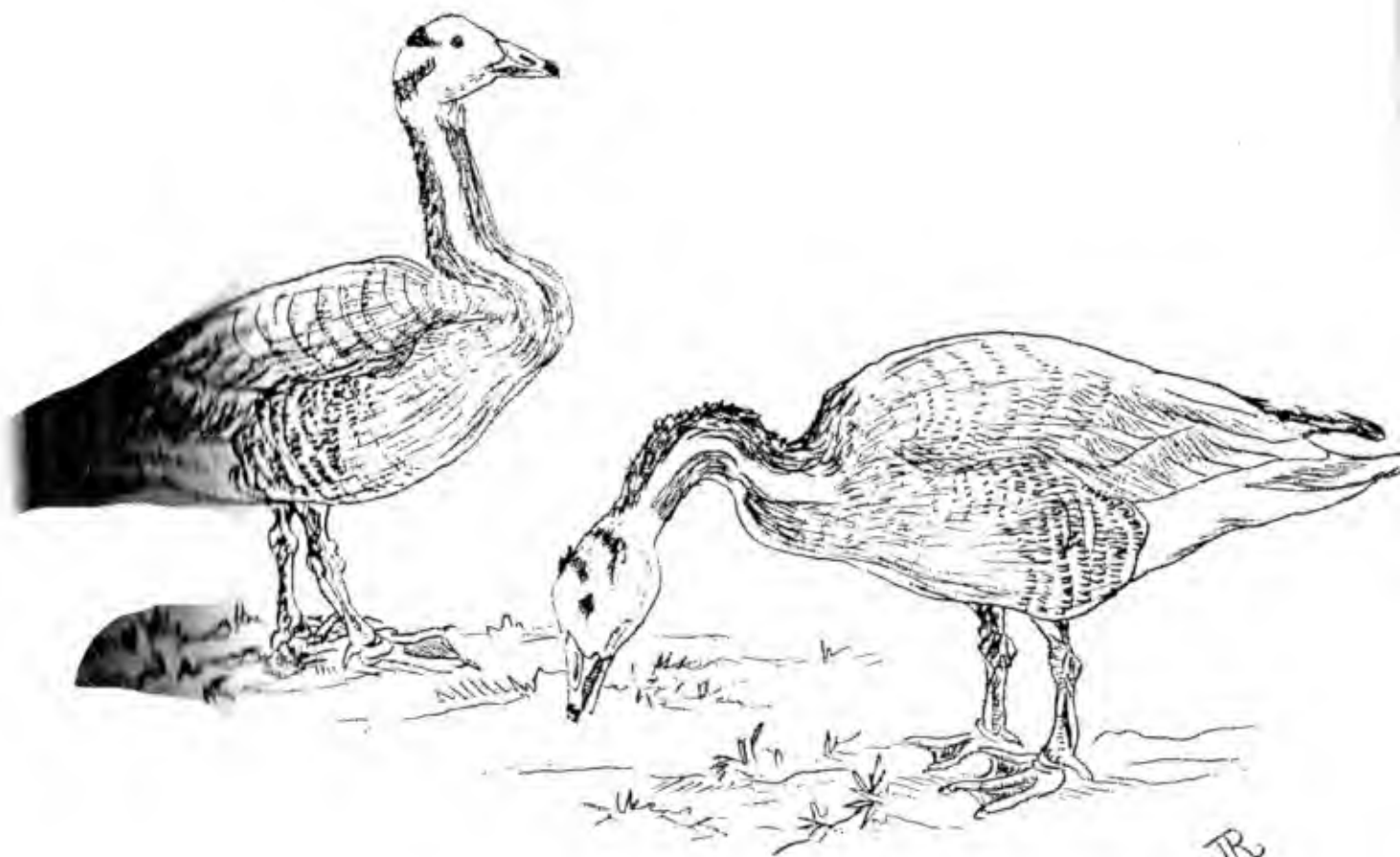
<u>Subject heading</u> (NOT exactly as in the Newsletter)	<u>Vol.</u>	<u>Issue No.</u>	<u>pp</u>
Accidents and diseases	5	11	4-5
Accidents to barbets	3	5	1-2
	3	6	11
Accidental death -- prey too large	3	7	4
Accidental -- caught in twigs	1	7	4
Ahwa town (Surat Dangs) birds in,	7	7	2
Albino Jungle Babbler	1	12	12
Anting	6	11	5-7
"	7	5	3-4
Assam -- birds of	6	11	1-4
	7	5	7-9
Association of birds with other animals -- sunbird nesting in spider webs	3	8	7
Aviary keeping -- review of book	4	10	8-9
Aviary -- Indian Bird Zoo, Dharangdhara	4	9	7-9
Robblers -- identification of Common and Striated	2	11	10
" Large Grey -- nesting of	2	2	4-5
	2	3	12-13
	2	4	12-13
Robblers. Whiteheaded in Kancheepuram	2	1	14
Padrinath -- birds around	1	9	4-6
	1	11	1-4
Balance of Nature	4	5	9
" and sparrows	1	4	3
Barbet, Crimsonbreasted, nest etc.	1	7	6
	2	5	1-3
" unusual food of	6	7	10
" found and reared	6	7	4-7
	6	8	5-6
	6	9	8-9
	6	11	11
Barbet, Green -- Roosting of	4	3	1-2
	4	4	6-7
" nesting of	4	9	5-7
" experiment with nest-box	1	8	1
Bathing -- Swallows bathing	4	3	6
" Paradise flycatcher	1	3	2
Baya Sparrow -- nests on telegraph wires	6	6	8-9
" colony -- notes on	7	9	4-5
" blackthroated weaver bird	7	9	9
Beak -- malformation in blue tit, treated	4	5	11
Bee-eaters -- Common Green, roosting	5	5	5-6
" Bluecheeked, migration of	3	7	4
Behaviour -- fostering chicks of same species	7	10	6-7
" -- window-tapping, Tailor Bird, Sunbirds	7	10	7

(To be continued)

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOLUME 8: No 7.



CONTENTS

A glimpse of Ganesh Himal bird life, Nepal. By Robert L. Fleming, Jr.	1
Birdwatching in Darjeeling and Sikkim. By N. M. Mistry	2
Birds of Mahabaleshwar. By Shama Futehally	4
<u>Prosopis juliflora</u> and bird nesting. By J. M. Johnson	5
Review: WORKING FOR NATURE. Council for Nature Report 1967/68. (Z.F.) .	6
NOTES AND COMMENTS	6
Correspondence: Black Drongo and Snakes. By H. P. Mookherji (p. 7); Summer Birdwatching in the plains. By K. S. Iyankumar (p. 7)	
Index to backnumbers of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers	

A GLIMPSE OF GANESH HIMAL BIRD LIFE, NEPAL

By

Robert L. Fleming, Jr.

Our camp might have been called ' Titmouse Terrace '. Perched at 10,000 feet elevation on a grassy rise between flowing Rhododendron barbatum, our tents were within the territories of six species of Paridae.

As we were setting up camp on 29 April 1968, a flock of six Rufous-fronted Titmice, Aegithalos iouschistos, arrived in a nearby maple tree. They foraged on twig tips and also clung to the tree trunk. We knew that their nests had never been discovered so we dropped tent pegs and rushed after them, only to discover no particular signs of nesting activity. Perhaps it was a bit early. In early May, however, we could find only solitary birds and so the females may have been incubating. We felt that these tits definitely breed at this altitude; probably in May. The closely allied Red-headed Tit, Aegithalos concinnus, occupies an altitudinal zone directly below the R. f. tits and breeds earlier. We found a nest with nearly fledged young at 8500 feet on 27 April.

The Himalayan Coal Tit, Parus ater, was the most conspicuous and audible tit near our camp. They were breeding in late April and early May. During most of the day this tit spends its time high in the towering conifers (Hemlock, Tsuga, was most common here). In the early mornings they often came down to water and we caught and released a number from our nets. When alarmed by an owl call, these birds sometimes swarm around a tree (usually a maple) in such an excited state that they resemble a gathering of bees rather than birds. In one such flock, at 10,000 feet, there must have been over 70 birds.

The Rufous-bellied Crested Tit, Parus rubidiventris, was not especially common around our camp. It became more conspicuous at 10,500 and at 12,000 feet it had virtually replaced the Coal Tit. These two black tits resemble each other in the field. We found the most easily recognizable field character was the crest ' thickness '. The Coal Tit has a ' thin ' crest of a few elongated feathers; whereas the R. b. C. Tit has a ' bushy ' crest. Of course, the Coal Tit is smaller than the other and has a double row of wing spots, but this is sometimes hard to see as the birds are usually in silhouette high in some ' neck-breaking ' tree. We had thought that the R. b. C. Tits were always in tall, conifer forest so were surprised to see them in semi-open country of low bushes and dwarf rhododendrons between 12,000 and 13,000 feet.

The Brown Crested Tits, Parus dichrous, were neither as conspicuous nor as

as common as the Black Tits. The Brown Tit occupied an altitudinal level from 10,000 feet through 13,000 feet where they kept to the secondary trees and bushes, rather than the tall conifers. We also found the Brown Tit on the ground, foraging amongst the leaves. While the Black Tits were sometimes in flocks even during the breeding season, the Brown Tits were seen only in pairs or singles.

The colourful Greenbacked Tit, Parus monticolus, was common here but could hardly be called conspicuous. Two pairs were nesting, evidently, near our camp but try as we might we couldn't locate a nest. Netted females had brood patches and occasionally we saw a pair chasing through a tree. Their high, lispy call was infrequently heard. This bird is a frustrating one to watch for we often caught glimpses of one only to lose it quickly among the new maple leaves and swarming leaf warblers. Even birds released from our nets soon ducked out of sight! In any case, this titmouse was definitely breeding in late April and early May at 10,000 feet. Apparently young had not yet hatched.

The Yellowbrowed Tit often enjoys a bath in the late afternoon. A pair, showing little fear of me, flew down into dwarf bamboo and then fluffed around in a small forest pool (we used water from the same trickle for our camp chores). After the bath, the pair preened for a long time in a neighbouring rhododendron bush. This titmouse appears uniform dull green. The eyebrow just barely shows when the bird is excited but this can hardly be seen from a distance of over six feet. This bird is often confused with leaf warblers and an observer must look carefully to spot one. We found the easiest way, for us, to tell the difference between a leaf warbler and a Y. b. Tit was bill thickness. In silhouette, which is the way these birds usually appear, the thin bill of a leaf warbler is easily distinguished from the thicker bill of the Tit. Behaviour is also a good indicator. The Tit flicks its wings constantly, as do warblers, but it does not change branch positions as frequently as a warbler. For example, if a green blob disappears behind a leaf and remains there for over two seconds it may be a Y. b. Tit. Warblers, unless sick or resting, usually change position within two seconds. Also, if a bird hangs upside down on some twig tip, it is likely to be the Tit.

Besides titmice, the forests around our camp held numerous Leaf Warblers (P. pulcher, maculipennis, reguloides, proregulus and magnirostris). Nutcrackers, Nucifraga caryocatactes, had fledged from the nest but fuzzy young will still be fed by the adults. They spent a good deal of time looking for food on the ground. The Whitespotted Laughing Thrushes, Garrulax ocellatus, were relatively tame here, in contrast to reports of how shy they are in other places (see Ali, THE BIRDS OF SIKKIM, 1962: 178), and allowed us to watch them feed on the forest floor and sing from rhododendron trees. At first we were puzzled with a loud, mammal-like rruunk cry but then realized it was the Crimson Horned Pheasant, Tragopan satyra, calling. These birds inhabited the moss-covered forest floor, usually near streams. The sight of a magnificent male walking through bushes of flaming rhododendron was unforgettable.

The wooded hills north of Kathmandu teem with birds in April and May. We identified 201 species on our recent trip. The weather is usually good but cool at higher altitudes. It is an ideal time for a vacation visit for those interested both in birds and flowers.

BIRDWATCHING IN DARJEELING AND SIKKIM

By

N. M. Mistry

This summer I trekked from Darjeeling to Gangtok with two friends. We followed a somewhat circuitous route which took us first along the Singhalila Ridge to Sandakphu and Phalut and then across the hills and valleys of southern Sikkim to Gangtok. However the gods of the weather were not in our favour, and I am sure that we missed much birdlife owing to poor visibility.

On the way from Darjeeling to Ghoom the first bird to greet us was the Common

I N D E X

NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

By

K. K. Neelakantan

Continued

<u>Subject heading (NOT exactly as in the Newsletter)</u>	<u>Vol.</u>	<u>Issue No.</u>	<u>pp.</u>
Behaviour -- attacking own reflections, sparrow	7	11	13
" --- breast-wetting	4	10	11
" --- collective feeding at nest	1	11	9-10
" --- ' food-washing '	5	3	9-10
" --- play? Cormorant and catfish	3	9	6
" --- hostile behaviour	2	2	6-7
Bengal --- birds of W. Bengal	7	10	5
Bhubaneswar (Orissa) --- birds of	7	5	9-10
"	7	9	9
Bhutan (Darranga), birds of	6	3	1
Bharatpur --- Keoladeo Ghana	6	5	6-7
"	3	8	8
"	2	10	2-5
"	4	3	10
"	7	4	9
" list of birds in	4	2	7-9
"	7	11	7-11
Bihar. Birdcatchers of	4	3	11
Birds -- Foreigner's impression of Indian birds	3	4	
	3	6	3-4
	5	2	1-3
Birds common to India and N. Europe	6	3	6
Bird distribution -- evenness of	5	2	2
Birds and flowers	3	5	11-12
	4	7	6-7
	4	4	2-4
	5	6	5-6
	6	9	1-3
Birds and plants	1	9	1
Birds and pesticides	3	6	9-10
	3	7	12
	3	12	8
	4	7	8
Birds -- hazards to planes	3	5	5-8
Birds -- disease carriers	3	3	1-3
	6	5	8-10
Birds and man. Economic value	5	2	10
" air guns	5	3	8
Birds -- their role in national economy	5	2	10
Birds and snakes	5	2	10-11
	4	12	12
Birds of Europe and India	4	12	1-2
Bird life -- changes due to environmental changes etc.	2	5	16
Birds and dam sites -- in Ceylon	4	10	9
Birds -- Craftmanship of nesting bird	6	1	2-3
Birds -- Social life of	7	5	4-5
Bird behaviour. Plucking and eating feathers	7	6	10
Birds of a casuarina grove -- Adyar, Madras	6	10	3-5
Birds in a Juhu garden	6	6	4-5
Birds sipping dew	7	7	11
Birds on a tree gum	7	8	2
Bird-baths in tea estates	7	8	2
Birds fostering young of own kind	7	8	11-12
Birds -- Intuition in	7	9	5-7
Birds in Kalidasa's works	5	6	6
Birds -- popular notions regarding	7	11	13
" ' leader ' vulture etc.			
Bird study -- suggestions on	5	3	5-6
Birdwatching = books	4	8	4

: 2 :
I N D E X

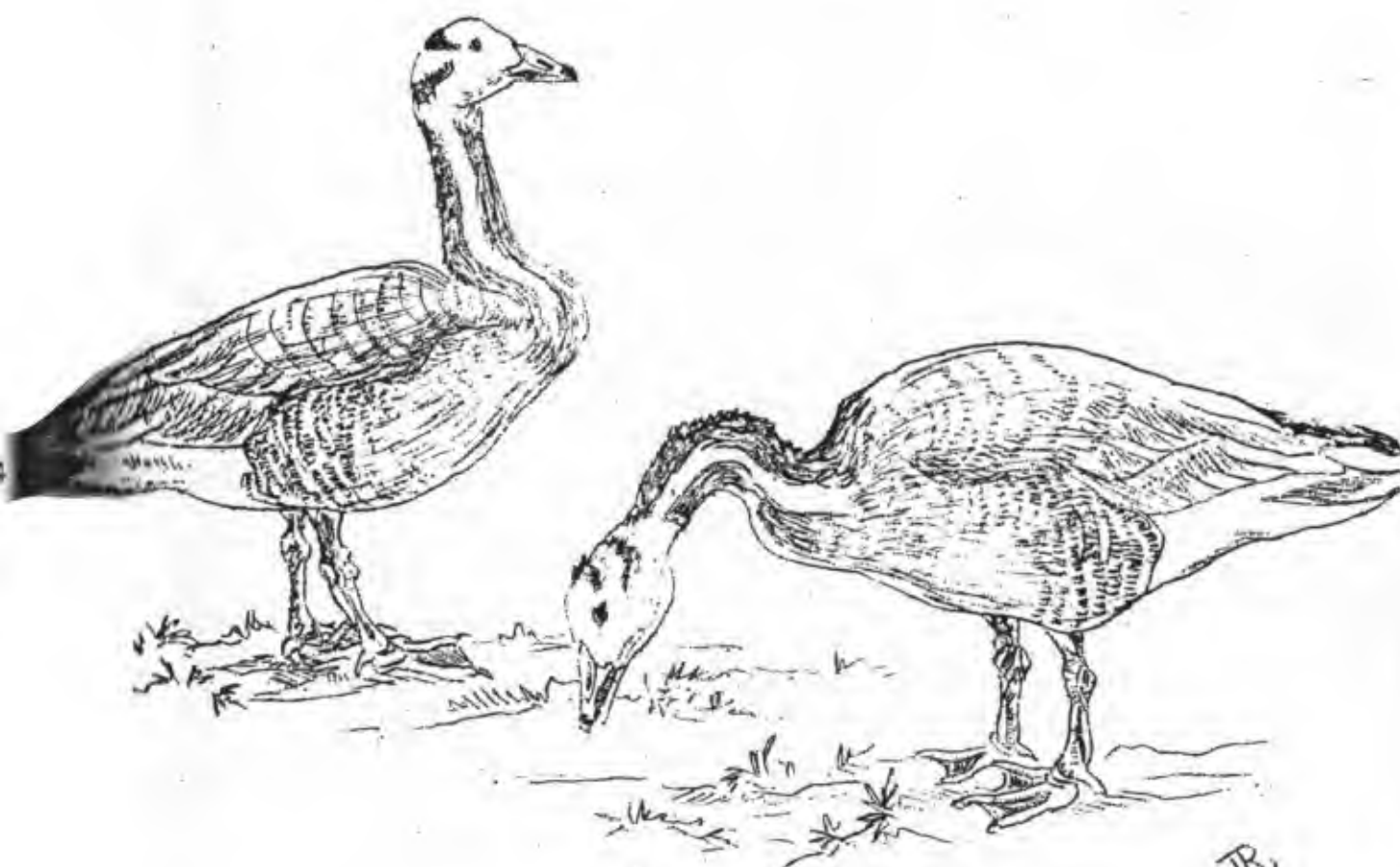
	Vol.	Issue No.	pp.
Birdwatching - books	7	10	4-5
" "	7	4	10
" "	7	2	8-9
" "	6	12	1-5
Birdwatching - occupational hazards	7	6	9
Bird Study - B.T.O.U. and its work	2	9	10-11
Birdwatching - study the living bird	2	4	1-4
"	2	5	5-9
" Placing the family	5	12	4-6
in India	1	3	11
"	1	5	1
" pleasures of	3	7	5-6
" advice to beginners	1	11	8-9
	4	1	7-8
	7	7	2-3
	4	4	9
Birdwatching. Field characters of birds	6	11	7-8
" Growth of and causes	7	1	6-7
	5	3	12
	4	10	11-12
	4	12	7-8
Birdwatching in Kihim (Bombay)	3	12	4-6
" back-door step the best place?	3	9	4-5
" in the United States, programmes etc.	3	1	8-9
" -- Cooperative field work	3	2	1-3
from a train	7	1	1-3
Jamnagar salt-pans	7	5	10
hazards of	5	4	9
birds and trees etc.	5	7	8-9
competition results	2	5	13-14
Binoculars -- selection of	4	4	4-5
"	4	7	8-9
	2	2	9
Bitterns -- 3 Indian bitterns	5	8	2
Blackbirds in Bombay	1	5	4
Bombay -- new bird records	5	1	10
" Birds of Byram Baug area	4	1	14-15
birds in	3	4	1-3
	3	5	12-13
	7	8	10
Breeding -- Early records for Orissa	4	6	1-2
Breeding behaviour -- Yellow-wattled Lapwing	4	9	12
Breeding season -- early breeding	4	8	2-3
Bulbul -- Redvented	7	10	6-7
" " nesting behaviour	3	10	2-5
" Whitecheeked in S. India	4	8	7
" Whitebrowed, eating mushroom	6	2	12
Bustard -- Houbara in England	3	1	3
" Great Indian	3	1	3-4
" "	3	6	4-5
" "	3	9	3-4
" "	3	2	11
" " in Ahmedabad area	6	11	9
" " status etc.	2	10	1-2
	2	10	12-13
	3	8	10-11
	3	4	4
	3	5	12
Buzzard -- White-eyed attacking cormorant	1	9	9

(To be continued)

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOLUME 8; No 8.



NEWS LETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 8, No. 8

August 1968

CONTENTS

Notes from Saurashtra. By K. S. Iyankumar:

1. The Status of the Watercock in Saurashtra
2. The Terns of Saurashtra
3. The Birds of Girnar

Report No. 1. Bombay Natural History Society's Bird Migration Study
Project. 19 September 1967 to 10 March 1968. (With a map)

NOTES FROM SAURASHTRA

By

K. S. Iyankumar

The Status of the Watercock in Saurashtra.

I am very careless about noting down daily records of birds, and consequently, a good deal of information is lost. Unfortunately this is the case with my observations on the status of the Kora or the Watercock in this area.

Five years ago, I was handed a live bird by a friend who had caught it in late July on his farm, far from water. Examining it, I was thrilled to find a bird which I had never seen before and which I had always thought was of utmost rarity in this area, a female Kora. This record during a drought year was, further, astounding. My surprise will be understood when I quote two eminent naturalists. In his BIRDS OF SAURASHTRA, M. K. S. Dharmakumarsinhji mentions only two records from Bhavnagar and says this bird is 'Apparently very rare in Saurashtra. Non resident.' In his notes on the Birds of Gujarat, Dr Salim Ali writes: 'Not met with by the Surveys. Lester records a pair shot in Kutch on 4.vii.1897, and collected eggs there presumably belonging to this species.'

This captured bird came from a few miles distance of Rajkot, and quite obviously the bird finding its water-pools drying up and reedbed hide-out destroyed had taken shelter in the small orchard where it was caught, loth to fly across sunscorched fields around.

In 1965, I was once on a walk in late June along the river above Jaskan, and in the falling light of dusk, I was pleased to see a Watercock feeding out in the open besides a reed-fringed pool. Next morning I went to the area again and saw in a stretch of half a mile four Koras all feeding away from cover! They were very confiding and permitted a close approach. In 1966, again in June, Koras were seen along the same stretch of the river by Shivraj Kumar and Lalsinhhai. Shivraj Kumar again watched them there in the summer of 1967.

On 29th June 1968 I went down to the large pools a little above the low causeway across the river near Shivraj Kumar's farm, and sure enough a Kora flew into denser reeds. I settled down by the water to watch other birds when from behind me a cock Kora quietly walked down to the water and casually fed in full view at about 30 feet. There was still plenty of sunlight. Through field glasses I could clearly see the green and red casque, the markings on the back. The rail-like characteristic habit of flicking the short tail was easily noticeable. Slowly and quite fearlessly

the bird walked, feeding up a foot path leading along the water's edge.

June is the driest month in Saurashtra and as such, if these are regularly to be found in the area, it can be accepted with confidence that the watercock in the river near Jasdan is resident and there is no reason to assume it is not the same in other suitable areas in Saurashtra.



Head of a Kora - Woodcock

(Reproduced from Stuart Baker.)

[The watercock is supposed to have a range all over India and Burma, being most common in the NE. and SW. of India. The breeding season is from June to September, the nest being built in reed-tangled swamps near lakes, being a cup of grass, weeds and sticks, but varying greatly in size. An average clutch comprises around five eggs, which vary from white to stone-yellow to pink, marked with red-brown spots. — Ed.]

The Terns of Saurashtra.

On our freshwater lakes of Rajkot and Jasdan, I have seen seven species of terns: The Indian River Tern, The Blackbellied Tern, The Little Tern, The Caspian Tern, The Gullbilled Tern, The Whiskered Tern, and The White-winged Black Tern.

During the cool season, when all these may be seen together on the same stretch of water, identification becomes a trifle confusing, but a little careful observation can untangle the apparent confusion. We can safely group these terns into two forms, those which plunge headlong into the water from a height and other which skim close above its surface,

lightly touching the water to pick up food. The former have graceful bouyant flight with deliberately deep wing strokes, while the latter appear to have a more fluttering flight. The first group is characterised by very conspicuously forked tails while the second group have more square-looking tails with only very slight forking.

The "Plunging" Terns include the Caspian, the Indian, the black-bellied, the Gull-billed and the Ternlet. The "Skimming" Terns are the Whiskered and the White-winged Black Terns.

In their 'off' plumage when they are seen together, all the terns have their black caps sullied with white streaking, sometimes very little black being apparant. The colours of the bills are not very bright either. However, careful study through field glasses shows up the various characteristics. The Caspian Tern is very large, and its wings are very much longer than its forked tail; the beak is a prominent scarlet red, and it flies at a greater height above the water than the rest. The River Tern has a yellow bill with red legs, the Black-bellied, which at this time of the year has no black on the lower parts, has an orange-yellow beak with orange-red legs and feet. The Ternlet's bill appears blackish, but the small size easily identifies it from the other terns. The Gull-billed has a black beak which appears shorter and thicker than that of the other terns; the head is white with a black smudge just behind the eye, and the legs are also black. The Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns are easily recognised from the others by their fluttering flight while feeding low over the water, often over wet mud and sand, but the two species can be easily confused. In fact, it is interesting to note that there are very few winter records of the last bird, whereas they seem to be more frequently recorded in spring when they are distinctive in their summer garb. Both these terns have blackish bills, but the Whiskered Tern shows more white on the head, which extends to the nape, while the White-winged Black has the white only to the top of the crown.

During summer, when the terns are in their nuptial plumage, the last of the Caspian and Gull-billed Terns have already left. Also departed are the White-winged Black Terns, though these assume their full summer plumage before they leave in April and May. But these little terns are most distinctive when so attired, being all black above and below, with attractive white wings and tail; they can then never be confused with any other terns. The Whiskered and Black-bellied Terns have this black plumage in summer only but on the lower parts, the back is grey in both the birds, as are the wings and the tail. The Black-bellied and Whiskered Terns, which resemble one another so closely at first glance, when breeding, are recognised by the colour of the bills, which are deep red, appearing almost black in the Whiskered Tern and orange yellow in the Black-bellied Tern. At this time of the year the two terns are not likely to be found in the same locality though, the former resorting to the aquatic vegetation of lakes and marshes to build floating nests on the water plants, while the latter is laying on sand and gravel edging lakes and large rivers.

In summary the other terns all have distinctive black caps, and are white on the lower parts and grey above. The Caspian is then recognised as in winter, by its large size and scarlet bill, the Indian by its deep yellow bill, the Gull-billed by a black beak and the Ternlet by its small size and yellow beak. The black on the Ternlet's crown is off-set by a white forehead.

There are, ofcourse, other terns along the sea coast but these marine terns do not come far inland, though one must be on the look-out for stragglers, especially when bird-watching close to the sea. If familiar with the seven species described, any strange-looking tern is easily spotted and careful notes of the abberant bird will then lead to an easy identification.

The Birds of Girnar:

Girnar is a very spectacular hill, isolated among the vast flat plains of Saurashtra. Its bulk dominates the horizon for miles around on clear days such as those which characterise the brightly lit post-monsoon period in August and September. This hill is listed as a tourist attraction. Few tourists, however, ever pause long enough to watch the great vultures and birds of prey soaring around on air currents wafting up the sheer sides, or ever stand to listen to the rapturous song of a Dhayal among the mango groves around the base of the hill.

I have been thrice to Girnar, and on each occasion I have admired the temples with their delicate carvings and ancient grace, but on each visit I became more and more attracted to the hills and the forests around. Above all it is the birds and the great variety of bird-life around that makes each visit a refreshing experience. Sitting beside a hill-stream I have often watched breathlessly as a male Paradise Flycatcher swept past me to snap a gnat above the water, his milky white body trailing fluttering ribbons of white feathers from his tail, and elegant creature wreathlike in form and a masterpiece never failing to astonish. Equally thrilling is the first view of a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher perched on a twig, its blue back illuminated by a beam of light and contrasting with a rich orange-red breast. With a flick it is gone into deep shade, from where it entices on and on with its pleasant ditty. The early light of a summer sun has hardly glazed the young russet leaves of a mango tree, when the melodious song of the Dhayal floods the air with a radiant soul, and flashing from one dark grove to the shadows of another the glistening Oriole darts in haste to hide lest the sun get envious of his bright golden colours, his mellow whistle is heard throughout the countryside.

The Tree Pie, with its bell-like call, the Fantail Flycatcher, ever on the move and uttering its merry jingle of a song, to the accompaniment of much turning and dancing, tail fanned all the time, the more sedate fanned, though brightly coloured Barbets, call incessantly through the hottest part of the day their repetitious metallic note, beside the entrance to their cavity excavated in a decaying branch. Ioras utter their musical 'shao bee gee' as they flutter from leaf spray to flower bunch industriously searching for insect prey, while loose flocks of Small Minivets sparkle through the trees, males with bright red breasts and rumps and the females in lemon yellow and pearl grey. The Golden-backed Woodpecker hammers into bark and utters its innate laugh as charming tits and pretty little nuthatches scurry and search for food of larvae and pupae secreted by ants inside crevasses. On all sides, the avian population is busy with domestic chores, the Green Bee-eaters and their larger cousins the Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters are rearing broods in nest holes tunneled into river banks close to other similar abodes by White-breasted, Pied and the gem like Common Kingfishers. In shrubberies, the sprightly Tailor-birds are busy stitching their leaf nests, masterpieces which have earned them world-wide fame, and overhead, the normally undemonstrative Indian Roller throws all reserve to the March winds and starts and aerial acrobatics that displays the wonders of his wings, to the apparent delight of his spouse and human watchers. Summer also has its intimate scenes such as the cosy cobweb hammock of the little White-eyes cradled in a hibiscus branch, the comfortable grass purse of the Indian Wren Warbler and the flimsy cup of roots high in a mango fork of the dashing King Crow who challenges all the ruffianly crows in the vicinity. The burst of orange of the Flame of the Forest tree in bloom attracts all the avian types in the neighbourhood and such trees provide most rewarding bird-watching, as green Parakeets, Mynahs, scintillating Sunbirds, Ioras, White-eyes and a multitude of other birds arrive to sip the nectar or snap up some delectable insects who are foolish enough to venture there for the same purpose.

On every side birds will be seen collecting nesting material, or those who have finished the construction side of things, grubs and green grasshoppers to push down gaping maws and extended throats of ever hungry

fledglings. Larks soar up on quivering wings and pour forth a melody upon the rich scene.

First come the flocks of boisterous Rosy Pastors, then Wagtails, delicate and elegant in form, the Swallows with sweeping flight, and then the innumerable water-side birds, the Ducks, Crane and along the seaboard, immense flocks of Flamingos. They all arrive in a great mass, and then, when our local birds are muted by the chilly winds, these the inhabitants of a hardier clime, rejoice in the warmth of the Indian sun. It is now that the sportsmen take out their guns and for the bird-watcher there are new and exciting birds to watch.

The winters are exciting in North India when the great influx of waterbirds from across the Himalayas arrives and brings ducks and geese, waders and warblers, and a great throng of raptors, finches, chats and exotic birds besides. The flights of duck, the gaggles of geese and the formation of crane all make the winter scene of Northern India. In the far south, where winter is no dramatic change in the lives of people and animals, great throngs of Cormorants, Pelicans, Egrets and tropical Storks, converge on jheels, there to breed in communal harmony with much rapturous clamour.

* * * * *

We reproduce below the formal report of the
Bharatpur Bird Ringing Project, sponsored by
the Bombay Natural History Society in 1967.
The report is by B.R. Grubb

Station: Chana Bird Sanctuary, Bharatpur (27° 13'N, 77° 32'E),
Rajasthan, India.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Salim Ali, D.Sc., F.N.I.

Team Members: P.B. Shekar
J.D. Panday
B.R. Grubb
two assistants, and 8 bird trappers.

This field study was conducted by the Bombay Natural History Society in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution, and the Migratory Animal Pathological Survey (MAFS).

As Bharatpur (see Journal 59:120) was then flooded in many parts Mr. F.B. Shekar was sent there on 18 September to see the condition and make necessary arrangements. Our bird trappers from Bihar viz. Mirshikars and Sahanis (see Journal: 61:380) had already arrived there. The rest of the team also reached Bharatpur soon after, and the work commenced on 21 September.

The Sahanis used their single-tier nets to catch ducks by fixing them over water and chasing the birds into the nets at night. The Mirshikars used their throwing nets and caught mostly waders. They needed shallower waters than the Sahanis. In addition to waders and duck, we caught terrestrial birds, mostly passerine, with mist nets within the sanctuary. Besides, we netted Spanish Sparrow and migratory House Sparrow (ssp. parkini or bactrianus) from a roost situated some 11 miles from the sanctuary (Journal 58:924). These sparrows were caught at the roost in two ways: 1. Fixing the nets in scrubland in the evening before the birds started coming to roost. 2. Holding the net on one side of the bush after sunset and driving the roosting birds from the other side.

In all we caught and ringed 21107 birds of 159 species. We desparasited 465 birds of 113 species with 'Dri-Die' (Si 02). Blood smear was collected from 796 birds of 130 species. The blood smears and the ectoparasites are being studied by the technicians of the MAPS in Bangkok.

The weather was normal and favourable during the first three months, except for the previous flood waters which prevented us from catching terrestrial species for a while. Towards the end of December and the major portion of January there were frequent showers and wind which greatly affected the work. Once again the weather became fine and continued to be so till the end of our field session. The winter was quite cold, and the ground temperature went down to almost 0°C in January.

Immediate Results

SEX RATIO: The sex ratio of thirteen species, on the basis of the birds we caught and ringed is shown in Table II. It becomes evident from the Table that in White-eyed Pochard Aythya nyroca, Bluethroat Erithacus svecicus, Magpie Robin Copsychus saularis and Indian Robin Saxicoloides fulicata, the percentages of the males are considerably higher than those of the females. On the contrary, in Ruff and Reeve Philomachus pugnax the females predominate in number, remarkably (72%). As no effort was made to catch any particular sex, the proportion of different sexes for these species in this area during the period of study should not differ very much from that given in the Table.

RECOVERIES: During the course of the field session we recaptured some of the birds we had previously ringed in Bharatpur. Also, some we ringed during the current field session were recovered and reported from various parts of North India, West Pakistan and the USSR (Table III). Those birds recovered beyond Indian limits have been plotted in the map. From the table it may be noted that some resident birds were recaptured in good condition after six years, in the same locality. An interesting case was that of a Reeve, ringed during 1966 in Bharatpur. This bird was recaptured by us in the same area and was released with a new ring. This bird finally ended its journey in Uttar Pradesh on 6 February 1968 when it was shot.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE OF INTERESTING MIGRANTS:

The Siberian Crane (Grus leucogeranus) was first noted to have arrived in the sanctuary on 31 December. We counted above 70 of them during the day while they were feeding in the shallow grassy part of the lake. Some individuals were apparently young, having patches of brown in their white plumage. Later on we noted more than 90 individuals. Their call was in single syllables at a high pitch, in two different notes. Almost every morning they flew into the sanctuary in two or three batches, and went out late in the evening. At times most of them disappeared and were not to be seen for several days. However, they were with us till the end of February.

Greylag geese were seen towards the end of October and were ringed till 11 February. They were very few during February. All the duck genus Anas ringed here, were present in more or less equal numbers throughout the field session, although there was an increased flow of the Blue-winged Teal into the sanctuary during February. Among the pochards, the Common Pochard and the Redcrested Pochard appeared late and were first caught in our nets on 15 November and 7 December respectively. Common Pochard was seen in good numbers till the end of our stay while Redcrested Pochard decreased in number considerably and was not caught after 20 February. Among the passerines the Blackthroated Thrush arrived very late and was caught from 15 February onwards. We got them in the nets till 28 February.

Among the migrants ringed, the maximum period an individual bird was known to have stayed with us is tabulated below (Table IV), based on the recaptures of birds ringed during the current session. Many might have stayed for a longer time. However, as they did not come into the nets we have no proof.

NEW RECORDS AND SOME INTERESTING VISITORS:

During the period of our study in Bharatpur, three species of birds recorded by us for the first time in Rajasthan State. They were: Vanellus cinereus (Greyheaded Lapwing), Halcyon pileata (Blackcapped Kingfisher) and Turdus boulboul (Greywinged Blackbird): (Journal 65:2).

The only Lapwing (Vanellus vanellus) we saw was the one we ringed. Ripley (1961) gives its winter range only down to Uttar Pradesh. The Lesser Sand Plover (Charadrius mongolus) was caught by us although it is not usually found in inland waters in its winter ranges except, rarely, on big rivers. The Dusky Leaf Warbler (Phylloscopus fuscatus) and the Rubythroat (Erithacus callipe) have not been known to visit Rajasthan although recorded from as near as Uttar Pradesh.

SPECIMENS COLLECTED: Twenty birds of the following species were made into study skins either for confirming identifications or because they were of scientific interest by way of their plumage, or range of distribution.

1. Nycticorax nycticorax Juv. o
2. Ibis leucocephalus Juv. o
3. Anas falcata Ad. o
4. Anas strepera Ad. o (Albino)
5. Hybrid of Aythya nyroca and A. ferina Ad. o
6. Accipiter badius Ad. o
7. Charadrius mongolus ad. o
8. Turnix suscitator Ad. o
9. Caprimulgus maharattensis Ad. o
10. Caprimulgus affinis monticolus Ad. o
11. Halcyon pileata Ad. o
12. Lanius cristatus Ad. o.
13. Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus Ad. o
14. Phylloscopus inornatus Ad. o
15. Phylloscopus subviridis Ad. o
16. Anthus campestris Ad. o
17. Anthus novaeseelandiae richardi Ad. o.
18. Passer domesticus Juv. o? and Ad. o (two).

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Readers may have seen from the Times of India that the Tulsi forest area is going to be converted into a National Park. We hope that the Maharashtra Government will follow up the suggestions in Dr. Salim Ali's letter to the Times of India which is reproduced below:

"The creation of a National Park around Tulsi Lake announced by the Minister of Forests recently will be welcomed by all citizens of Bombay. The area demarcated is one of exceptional beauty; and strangely, in spite of very great human interference by illicit wood cutters, construction works and other encroachments - still retains such interesting wild life as the Muntjac or Barking Deer. The habitat is suitable for the introduction of other animals like the Chital whose presence would give the environment added charm. When a proposal for introducing chital in the area was made to the previous Minister of Forests by the Society, it was postponed because it was felt that until the National Park was created, it would be very difficult to protect these animals. It is hoped that this proposal will now be implemented. For birdwatchers the locality is of great importance because such interesting species as the Rufous Woodpecker, the Racket-tailed Drongo, the Osprey, the Whitebellied Sea Eagle, and in fact a wide assessment of birds ranging from forest-dwelling types to those found in littoral and water areas exist within a comparatively small distance. To botanists, this is a laboratory of some importance, for nowhere else around Bombay is such a rich ecological and floristic complex available.

For all these reasons let us hope that the National Park will be quickly created. But the announcement that the same area would house a film studio, a Disneyland and several other artefacts of man causes us great concern. While it may be possible to make a multipurpose plan incorporating all these features, there is no inherent connection between a film studio, a Disneyland and a National Park, and we hope that nothing will be done to decrease the charm of the wooded area, which basically demands nothing more than rigid protection. It may not be out of place here to recall the resolution passed at the First World Conference of National Parks which was held at Seattle, Washington, in 1962.

"Whereas few of the world's parks are large enough to be in fact self-regulating ecological units but are more likely to be ecological islands subject to direct or indirect modification by activities and conditions in the surrounding areas, and whereas management based on scientific research is not only desirable but often essential to maintain some biological communities, the First World Conference of National Parks BELIEVES..... that research, management, planning and execution must take into account, and of necessity regulate, the human use for which the Park is created".

By National Park standards, the one at Tulsi will be a small unit, and the ecosystem may not be able to stand the strain of too many divergent activities. May I request the Minister of Forests to make use of the services of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, who are more than willing to assist Indian planners in arriving at a proper balance between aesthetic, ecological and economic values?"

Coincidentally, last Sunday, continual peacock calls in the area testified the success of the project of releasing numbers of peafowl in the area. When the time is ripe, perhaps the introduction of animals such as Chital may make an outstanding attraction of the Park.

Shally

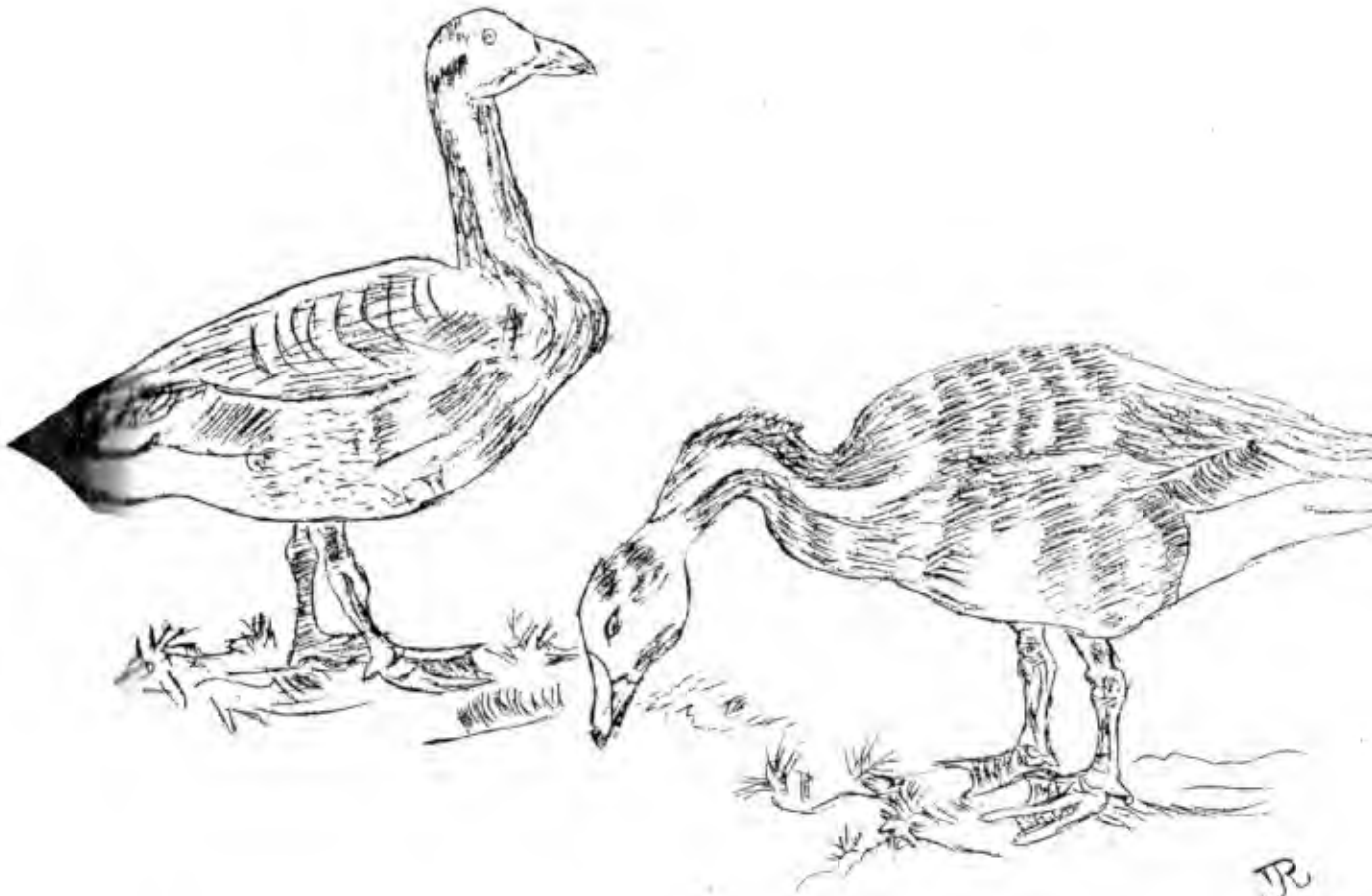
in Newsletter,
June,
May 56-AS.

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOLUME 8, No.9.

SEPTEMBER 1968.



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 8, No. 9

September 1969

Twenty-one Questions. By R. A. S. Melliush	1
A note on the behaviour of two House Crows. By K. K. Neelakantan	2
Birds of Bhopal. By Zafar Futehally	3
Pratincoles nesting on Lalpari Lake, a first for Saurashtra. By K. P. Jadav ..	4
Notes and Comments	5
Answers to the Twenty-one Questions	6
<hr/>	
Index to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers. By K. K. Neelakantan. (contd) ...	8

TWENTY-ONE QUESTIONS

By

R. A. S. Melliush

The quiz which follows will, it is hoped, provide readers with a few minutes' diversion. Answers are to be found on page of this Newsletter.

1. Do birds have a sense of smell?
2. Why do some birds swallow grit?
3. What kind of bird did Sir Edmund Hillary see following him when at 28,000 ft on Mount Everest in 1953 ?
4. What is the nictitating membrane?
5. What are the standard English names for the following:
(a) Brainfever Bird (b) Idle Schoolboy (c) Quacky Duck
(d) Coppersmith (e) Pharaoh's Chicken (f) Seven Sisters?
6. What colour are the legs of the following:
(a) Indian Courser (b) Black Ibis (c) Blackwinged Kite
(d) Stone Curlew (e) Grackle (f) Barheaded Goose?
7. Do birds possess colour vision?
8. A full-grown Pelican weighs about 25 lb. How much would you expect its skeleton to weigh -- (a) 5½ lb. (b) 14 oz. or (c) 1½ lb.?
9. What are the scientific names of the following families:
(a) hornbills (b) drongos (c) cranes (d) barbets (e) kingfishers
(f) nuthatches (g) pigeons and doves (h) pipits and wagtails
(i) owls?
10. Bee-eaters nest in holes. Do they (a) use a hole made by some other bird or animal (b) excavate a hole with their feet (c) excavate a hole with their beaks?
11. Which bird in each of the following groups is not classified in the same family as the other two?
(a) Dusky Crag Martin, Wiretailed Swallow, Alpine Swift.
(b) Tickell's Flowerpecker, Loten's Sunbird, Little Spiderhunter
(c) Grey Shrike, Rosy Minivet, Pied Flycatcher-Shrike
(d) Hobby, Shikra, Blackwinged Kite
(e) Golden Plover, Fantail Snipe, Great Stone Plover
12. What grouping is denoted by the ending ' -inae ' in scientific names?
..... 2

13. What Indian species of falcon has yellow irides?
14. In the following groupings of charadriine birds according to field characters there are some errors. Can you spot them?
 - (a) upcurved bill: Avocet, Terek Sandpiper, Greenshank, Bartailed Godwit
 - (b) white wing-bar: Kentish Plover, Large Sand Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Wood Sandpiper, Ruff, Little Stint
 - (c) white back: Redshank, Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Whimbrel, Curlew, Marsh Sandpiper, Turnstone, Bartailed Godwit
 - (d) white rump: Common Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Grey Plover, Green Sandpiper
 - (e) yellow beak: River Tern, Little Tern, Lesser Crested Tern, Whiskered Tern
 - (f) webbed feet: Avocet, Small Indian Pratincole, Crab Plover, Blackwinged Stilt
15. What group of birds regularly copulate while in flight?
16. What do the following words denote:
 - (a) anisodactyl (b) hallux (c) culmen (d) scapulars
 - (e) dertrum (f) speculum (g) occiput (h) zygodactyl?
17. The scientific name for the White-eye is Zosterops palpebrosa (Temminck); for the Skylark Alauda arvensis Linnaeus. Why are there parentheses round Temminck but not round Linnaeus?
18. Do any birds have teeth?
19. Which species is thought to make the longest of all migratory journeys?
20. What is pigeon-milk?
21. What Asiatic bird, common in India, has in recent years extended its range spectacularly and now breeds as far west as the British Isles?

A NOTE ON THE BEHAVIOUR OF TWO HOUSE CROWS

By

K. K. Neelakantan

24.vii.1968. Palghat. About 17.30 hrs. During a break in the prevalent monsoon weather, a House Crow sat on the compound wall with an air of abstraction hoping to get a few scraps from the kitchen close by. It was standing on one foot most of the time. Now and then it let down the other foot, but pulled it up almost at once. A day earlier I had noticed a common myna also doing the same thing. Both the crow and the myna always tucked up the same leg.

As I stood there, hardly ten feet away, wondering why these birds chose to give long rests to just one leg, another House Crow with noticeably ruffled plumage alighted a foot away from the first one and sidled up until it almost touched the other. It wiped the tip of its bill once or twice on the wall and took up a curious rigid pose. It thrust its bent head under the breast of the first crow and stood absolutely still. A few moments later the first crow (which had meanwhile assumed the normal two-legged stance) preened the other's crown and nape feathers. No loose feathers were seen dropping off, but the preener appeared to be eating something microscopic that had been removed from the other's plumage. The preening was done only 5 or 6 times. Then the preener took two or three steps away from the other, and resumed its reverie. But the second bird followed the other and once more went through the same routine, i.e. it wiped its bill twice or thrice on the wall, thrust its head under the other's breast and,

at spotting concealed birds -- saw a chick.

On an earlier visit we had found a scrape in the mud containing three eggs of greenish colour with spots and blotches. There were larger than those of Little Ringed Plover's which were also breeding on this lake. Mr Jaykumar, the President of our Club was with us but he could not be certain, but as we later saw the chicks I immediately reported the matter to him. He spoke to Shri Dharmakumarsinhji of Bhavnagar who said that this is a first record of the breeding of this species in Saurashtra.

Little Pratincoles have been recorded breeding on the Gaurishankar Lake of Bhavnagar.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The cutting down of the forests around Bombay for the past several decades has driven conservationists to despair, and inspite of several plans having been formulated for reforestation, nothing concrete has yet been done. Mr Nigel Sitwell, the editor of Animals magazine was here a few months ago, and was obviously impressed with the destruction that is in progress along the catchment areas at Tulsi and Vihar. In the last issue of his magazine he writes: ' In some countries wildlife disappears because of widespread poaching, which local law enforcement officers are unable to control effectively, due to lack of funds or inclination, or the difficulty of the terrain. Often it is a combination of all three factors. Another major cause is the sheer physical pressure of too many people. Such is the case in, for example, parts of India.

'I was recently in the Gir Forest -- the last home of the Asiatic Lion -- in Gujarat State, north of Bombay. There the lions seem well protected and certainly they are not poached. But there are many human beings in the area, and a great many domestic animals belonging to these people. The Gir Forest has a permanent population of something like 15-20,000 buffalo, and in the wet season about 50,000 cattle swell the numbers still further. All these animals eat a considerable amount of grass, thus depriving the native ungulates -- such as the cheetal, nilgai, and sambhar -- of food. As the deer decline in numbers, so the lions tend to turn to domestic stock for their food. The owners of the cattle and buffalo naturally object, and sometimes kill the offending lions.

'I gather that the problem has been partly solved by the government paying the owner compensation, if it can be proved that there was no negligence on his part -- but of course the real answer is to make the Forest a true sanctuary and not allow the cattle there at all. But whether this would be possible in a country with India's population and other problems is another matter. At first glance it seems insoluble, but no doubt there is an answer: let us hope that the two young zoologists who are just starting a two-year investigation of the Gir Forest (under World Wildlife Fund sponsorship) with one.

'Another forest, only a few miles outside Bombay itself, is threatened by people poaching trees. The forest is Tulsi Forest, and it is a favourite weekend attraction where people from the city can go for picnics, birdwatching, and so on. Leopards have even been seen there in the past year, and there is no doubt other wildlife is present as well. It is not a game sanctuary or national park, however, and although classified as a ' reserved forest ', the forest guards are few and are clearly fighting a losing battle.

' One tree brings 100 rupees as firewood, so the temptation is great. It is illegal to cut down living trees without proper authority, but dead trees can be removed by anyone who wants them. So the " poachers " come at night and strip the bark from the living trees, later claiming them when they have died. This practice could be stopped if the taking away of any trees were forbidden. There is also hope of Tulsi Forest becoming a national park before long -- which would bring many additional safeguards. It is important that such attractive natural areas are preserved, especially when they lie so close to major centres in countries like India where so much has already disappeared. '

One very encouraging development, however, around Bombay is the mass plantation of trees being undertaken by the Tata Engineering & Locomotive Co. in the new factory ground at Poona under the imaginative direction of Mr Sumant Moolgaokar. So far 32 thousand trees have been planted in that inhospitable rocky and moorish country. To ensure that these trees do not suffer the same fate as those planted by Government during our Mahotsava ceremonies every year, Telco made a dam on the estate to impound rain water. There is not much loss by percolation and the several million cubic feet of water impounded will ensure that these 32 thousand saplings and the many more which will be planted will one day grow into a magnificent wooded area. In the course of decades as a result of the leaf litter and the humus which develops, the soil will become more productive. New forms of life will exist here, and new varieties of birds will come to this area. This morning (25.viii.1968) we saw the following species of birds while strolling through this estate: Scavenger Vulture, Redvented Bulbul, Common Babbler, Tickell's Flower-pecker, Blackwinged Kite, House Crow, Little Brown Dove, Common Myna, House Sparrow, Crested Lark, Indian Robin, Streaked Fantail Warbler, Red Munia, Wiretailed Swallow, Redwattled Lapwing, Pariah Kite, Large Pied Wagtail, Indian Wren Warbler, House Swifts, Common Quail.

It would be a most interesting exercise for the management of Telco to keep a record of the changing pattern of Bird-life with the changing pattern of vegetation. Telco can be expected to take up such an imaginative assignment. Side by side with the distinguished visitors' register, there should be a register of the new species of birds that come there as a result of Telco's hospitality, and because of the pleasant environment which they are creating for avian visitors.

ANSWERS TO THE TWENTY-ONE QUESTIONS ON PAGE 1

In preparing these answers, we are indebted for some of the information to A NEW DICTIONARY OF BIRDS, edited by Landsborough Thomson, and to Salim Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS. For any inaccuracies here, however, these sources are not responsible.

1. Yes, a well developed one.
2. The grit is retained in the stomach to assist the muscles in the grinding and pulping of vegetable matter.
3. A chough.
4. A third eyelid, often transparent, located beneath the other two on the side of the eye nearest the beak.
5. (a) Common Hawk-Cuckoo (b) Malabar Whistling Thrush (c) Cotton Teal (d) Crimsonbreasted Barbet (e) White Scavenger Vulture (f) Jungle Babbler
6. (a) white (b) red (c) yellow (d) yellow (e) yellow (f) orange
7. Diurnal birds do, but nocturnal ones probably do not.
8. (c) $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb.
9. (a) Bucerotidae (d) Dicruridae (c) Gruidae (d) Capitonidae (e) Alcedinidae (f) Sittidae (g) Columbidae (h) Motacillidae (i) Strigidae.
10. (b)
11. (a) Alpine Swift (b) Tickell's Flowerpecker (c) Grey Shrike (d) Hobby (e) Great Stone Plover
12. Subfamily
13. None. Falcons all have dark brown irides.
14. The misplaced birds are:
(b) Little Ringed Plover, Wood Sandpiper (c) Bartailed Godwit
(d) Common Sandpiper (e) Whiskered Tern (f) Small Indian Pratincole, Crab Plover.
15. This claim is made for the Swifts.

16. (a) with three toes pointing forward and one backwards
(b) the rear toe of an anisodactyl foot
(c) ridge along top of upper mandible
(d) feathers on bird's shoulder
(e) tip of upper mandible, sometimes hook-shaped
(f) patch of colour on wing, characteristically of certain species of duck
(g) back of head
(h) with two toes pointing forwards and two backwards.
17. When Temminck named the species palpebrosa he did not name it in its present genus Zosterops, but Linnaeus named the Skylark arvensis in the genus Alauda and his classification has not been changed.
18. Recent birds have no vestiges of teeth. Fossils of prehistoric birds show teeth to have been characteristic at an earlier stage of evolution.
19. The Arctic Tern, Sterna paradisaea, has a range of 11,000 miles, and individual birds of the species must travel upwards of 8000 miles.
20. . A nutritious, curdlike secretion of the crop of adult pigeons, smelling of cheese, on which they feed their nestlings.
21. The Ring Dove, Streptopelia d. decaocto.

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32-A Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

I N D E X

NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

By

K. K. Neelakantan.

Continued

	Vol.	Issue No.	
CAGED bird returning 6 months after escape	7	3	1
Calcutta - birds in a Calcutta garden	5	4	6-7
" common migrants of	6	12	6
Calls -- bird-song etc.	2	5	2
"	2	6	12-13
" as means to identification	2	10	14
" difficulty in describing	2	12	4-6
" of young cuckoos	3	3	11-12
" of young birds	3	4	3
" morning song	3	5	10-11
" of owls	4	6	8
" need for recording	5	8	10
Cape Comorin -- birds of	5	9	7-8
CARE of young. Carrying young on back in flight?	4	4	1-2
" wetting young to keep them cool	4	1	12
" " " with important references to literature	4	8	2
" " Cattle Egret	4	8	5
CENSUS of birds. Why, how, etc.	4	10	11
Changing landscape and bird life	1	12	1-2
Chat. Brown rock chat re identification etc.	3	8	11
Chloropis -- Goldfronted	2	10	5-6
Classification and names	7	3	10
Clubs -- Birdwatchers' Field Club of India. Genesis etc.	3	1	7-8
"	1	1	1
"	2	1	1-2
"	2	2	11
"	3	5	11
Club -- Birdwatchers', Baroda	3	9	8-9
Cochin -- Birds of	1	6	6
"	1	10	9
"	1	12	6-7
"	2	6	10
"	6	12	7-8
Collective feeding at nest	1	11	9-10
Conservation -- Game laws etc.	2	9	11-12
" XIII International Council for Bird Preservation	2	10	11-12
" Protection of Kiwi	4	3	8
" Sporting licences	4	3	9-10
" balance of nature	4	5	9-10
" Whooping Crane	4	7	7
" plan for	4	11	1-2
" review of book on (American)	5	4	8-9
" I.C.B.P. (International Council for Bird Preservation)	7	4	8-9
"	6	9	5-8
" Wild Life Week	6	11	10-
" educating the public	7	1	8
" management of national parks	7	11	4-6
Competition -- bird listing	2	3	10-
Coppermith -- Rescue of	4	6	6-8
" Roosting of	5	11	7-8
" Nesting of	6	1	4-5
Corbett National Park -- Birds in	4	5	12-13
Cormorant -- Large C. Cooperative feeding	3	9	6
Counting/Census of -- American X-mas Count	4	1	8-10

	Vol.	Issue No.	pp.
Crag Martin -- Dusky, hawking feathers	3	1	11
	3	2	11-12
Crakes -- hints re. identification etc.	3	10	5-6
Crane -- Demoiselle, weather prophets	3	1	6
" Whhopping Crane	4	7	7
Creepers -- Wall Creeper in Delhi	2	3	4-5
Crows -- Extract from Lockwood Kipling	3	4	14
Crow - Jungle, and reflection in glass	3	5	2-4
" House, burying sodden cigarette stub	4	9	12
Crows -- Collecting bright objects	4	12	8
" passion for hoarding	5	1	13
	5	2	11
Crows, Jungle, hiding food	5	3	12
" Destruction of, as pest	5	7	8
" population of, in Khandala village	5	11	1-3
" strange choice of roost	6	1	1-2
" unusual mating behaviour	6	10	7
	6	11	12-13
Crow-Ecological study proposed	7	1	6
" Eating own feather	7	4	9-10
" arson by and anting	7	5	3-4
" shifting nest?	7	6	9
" nests made of wire	7	7	12
" aggressive behaviour of nesting	7	8	13
Crow tribe food robbers; stole food stored for use of mountaineers at 20 and 21,000 feet	6	1	7
Crow-Pheasant eating water snails	3	5	8
" " fish	3	6	12
" " putrid flesh in trap	3	11	7
	5	8	8
Cruelty to birds, punishable offence	1	11	11
C.S.I.R. Scholarship in Field Ornithology	2	6	12
Cuckoos in Bihar -- tips on identification	3	1	4-5
" Calls of young	3	4	3
" Hawk-cuckoo, calls of	3	2	11
" Drongo-cuckoo at Ernakulam	3	9	4
" Pied Crested	6	5	7-8
" " " movements of	6	6	7-8
" " " " "	6	10	9
" " " arrival date for Ahmedabad	7	7	10-11
" " " " Bihar	7	8	11
Cuckoo-shrike, large, in Delhi	1	12	11
Curlew -- (Stone-Curlew)	4	9	4-5
	6	8	3-4

(To be continued)

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 8—No. 10—1968 October



only from Kumaon terai, Bhutan Duars and Goalpara district (Assam), has been found to not only occur but also breed in the North Salt Lake near Calcutta. All the nests of the two breeding colonies discovered in the North Salt Lake were exclusively in reeds and rushes over standing water, which also formed the nesting material, in contrast to earlier reports of nests in grassy areas intermixed with shrubs or in tree tops, and grass forming the nesting material. In the Salt Lake colonies there were 31 complete nests (some with eggs or nestlings) and many in various stages of construction. A male specimen in breeding plumage, nest, eggs and nestlings collected in the Salt Lake have been described.

The Firm's Baya, Ploceus megarhynchus Hume, the largest among the Indian Weaver Birds, is of much interest to ornithologists for its alleged rarity and because both sexes wear bright nuptial plumage in this species, unlike others of the genus where only the males show this feature. For an account of the history of the species Ali and Crook (1960) may be referred to.

According to Ripley (1961, p. 611), its range is: 'U. P. in the Kumaon terai below Nainital, Bhutan duars and western Assam, Goalpara (Agia); may occur in the Nepal terai; in the plains up to 1500 ft., in tall grass and secondary scrub'.

The present note records not only its occurrence but also the discovery of its breeding colony in the reeds and rushes over standing water in the North Salt Lake (c. 8-10 km east of Calcutta), 24 Parganas district, West Bengal.

In the swamps of the Salt Lakes, bayas have always been seen feeding, roosting and breeding in great flocks in the reeds and trees. Occasionally they were captured and found to represent the Common, Streaked or Black-throated Baya. Recently (late April 1966), however, a flock of some fifty birds caught our attention by their strikingly different, bright yellow plumage. On 8 May 1966, a single bird was collected while it was perching on a fencing, the other birds of the flock being at that time busy in the thick reeds some fifty metres away. On examination, it was found to be a male Firm's Baya in breeding dress. Since during the last few years the Firm's Baya used to be brought in considerable numbers in the Calcutta bird market and was available round the year from the dealers, the Salt Lake birds were thought to be escapees from the cages. However, a search in the surrounding reeds on 17 July 1966, revealed the presence of a breeding colony of the Firm's Baya. In this colony there were 12 complete and a number of incomplete nests in various stages of construction. Some of the complete nests had eggs and some had nestlings. A second colony was also found nearby on 7 August 1966. In the latter there were 19 complete nests but only three had eggs in them. The first colony probably could not succeed in raising the nestlings, because curiously enough, on 2 August 1966, it was found to be deserted. No eggs or young could be found, except a single rotten egg floating below a nest, obviously dropped from it. The cause of desertion was perhaps the almost continuous heavy rains in the area for more than three days from 29 July 1966.

An adult male in breeding plumage was collected on 8 May 1966 by my colleague Shri D. K. Ghosal from Nalbani, North Salt Lake (c. 9 km east of Calcutta), 24 Parganas district, West Bengal. It measures: Wing 80 mm, tail 63 mm, bill 21 mm, depth of bill at base 12.3 mm. It is undoubtedly a Firm's Baya, Ploceus megarhynchus Hume, and probably belongs to Abdulali's (1960) eastern subspecies salimalii. Since the subspecific status of the specimen is yet to be confirmed, its description is given below so as to avoid confusion.

Above: Head, nape and sides shining Indian yellow (Ridgway, 1886) with contrasting sepia on ear coverts and lores. Nape with a few feathers tipped dark brown. Back dark brown with broad streaks of Clove brown (Ridgway, 1886). Rump Indian yellow with a mixture of dark brown feathers, so also the upper tail coverts, but a few anterior feathers dark brown.

Rectrices dark brown with yellow margins and pale tips.

Below: From chin to vent Indian yellow, lighter and purer than on upper side. Thighs brown. Posteriormost under tail coverts buffish white.

A patch of dark brown on either side of neck. On closer examination the crown appears glistening, so also the shafts of feathers of the chin and throat. Primaries dark brown, darker on the inner secondaries, scapulars and coverts, each feather margined fulvous. The median coverts and innermost secondaries with some cinnamon in addition to fulvous on the margins. Axillaries and under wing coverts whitish. Bend of wing Primrose yellow (Ridgway, 1886).

In 1912, O'Donel found nests of the Finn's Baya in Bhutan Duars in a vast area of grass more or less intermixed with scrub (Baker, 1934). Ali and Crook (1960) located breeding colonies in tree tops about 9 to 10 metres above the ground level in Kumaon tarai. They also found nest-building in reeds and rushes over standing water. These nests were, however, never completed and were thought to be 'doodlings' of the first year birds. In the Salt Lakes the colonies were traced in a large 'bheri' (fish-rearing tank) overgrown with reeds and rushes and other aquatic plants. The 'bheri' had a lining of dense reeds and rushes about 50 to 150 metres broad. The central pool also had several patches of reeds here and there. The breeding colonies were located in these central patches of reeds, the first one being some sixty metres north of the second. They were in a metre deep standing water and nests were 40 to 90 cm above the water level. Streaked Bayas were also nesting in adjacent reed patches.

The nest of the Finn's Baya is cylindrical in shape, the exterior presenting various loops and sharp angles of strips of leaves. The structure is knitted round a bunch of reed stems which give support to the nest and hold it in vertical position. The rather small entrance lies on one side, generally near the equatorial plane. The opening is usually round. In some nests a slightly projecting cornice partly conceals the opening. Though bulky in appearance, the nest is loosely knitted and lacks toughness. Small gaps are frequently found here and there on the matrix, causing the eggs to fall down occasionally in water below. A nest measures: total length 270 mm, maximum diameter 165 mm, depth of brooding chamber 105 mm, diameter of entrance 45 mm.

The nest of the Finn's Baya is completely unlike that of any of its Indian cousins. Baker (1934) stated that it had resemblance with the Golden Weaver Bird (*Ploceus hypoxanthus* Sparrman) of South-East Asia. Ali and Crook (1960) found much resemblance with the African *Quelea* both in form and in the method of attachment, as well as in the stages of construction. Nesting material found by O'Donel in Bhutan Duars (Baker, 1934) and Ali and Crook (1960) in Kumaon tarai were strips of grass. The Salt Lake birds, however, obtain the nesting material from reeds (*Phragmites karka*) and bulrushes (*Typha* sp.) only. Major part of the nest is made out of reeds. Surrounding a bunch of reed stems the structure is knitted with coarsely cut leaf blades of reeds. The leaves of the supporting stems are also incorporated within the matrix of the nest. Long-fiber-yielding leaves of bulrushes are also freely used in knitting the matrix where necessary. The inner lining of the brooding chamber of occupied nests is furnished with the inflorescence of reeds. It appeared remarkable that the entire patches of reeds where the colony stood were practically devoid of leaves due to their consumption in nest-construction by the Finn's Baya. It suggests that the builder Bayas did not go far to obtain the nesting material.

In the first colony, on 17 July 1966, there were 12 complete nests and many incomplete ones in various stages of construction. Of these latter, two were at the ring stage, several at the wad stage and one nearing completion. A single case of double-nest was also found. Three weeks later, the second colony had 19 complete nests, three at the ring stage and several at the wad stage.

Clutch-size varies from two to four, but generally it is two to three. Eggs are immaculate white in colour like those of other Indian weavers but differ in shape. They are rather fusiform, being much broader at the broad end and

have kept their cage just by the side of my bed, many times I wake up from my sleep by their loud call. But I think besides this loud call they also produce a short and faint song which sounds like see-see-which-which. This seems to me a bit musical. But it is strange that this little song and loud call is generally produced in night hours only. At least I never hear the call in day time.

As regards their food habits I have to say that besides seeds they also eat a large amount of insects including large black ants. I once observed that a large black ant entered their cage and they at once picked it up. After that I caught some black ants and put them in their cage. They finished the ants quickly. I think that very few birds take black ants in their meal.

These birds were netted in eastern U. P. in the middle of July. As migratory habits of Rain Quail are not well known, it is my suggestion that they should be netted in large numbers and then released again in their natural haunts after ringing. This will throw some light over their seasonal migrations from one part of the country to another part.

Whitewinged Wood Duck on very of extinction

(From Amrita Bazar Patrika, August 12, 1968)

GAUHATI, Aug. 11:

The whitewinged wood duck of Assam, a unique species in the world, is in danger of extinction. There are only one or two birds of its kind in the Dibrugarh Reserve, which was made a sanctuary for the species a few years ago, it is learnt here today.

Although it is clearly stated in the gun licences that these rare and vanishing birds are closed to shooting all the year round, some people, it is alleged are indiscriminately killing these birds, which are also found in small numbers in several other forests of Upper Assam.

A non-migratory species, the whitewinged wood duck (Sairina scutulata), is a black and dark brown bird of large size, with spotted black and white neck, and with conspicuous white patches on the wings. It is not to be confused with the hukta or Como duck (Ardeotis melanocephala) of which the body is white below and of which the drake has a conspicuous knob or caruncle at the base of its bill.

Mr. M. J. S. Machenzie of Deasmoolie Tea Estate, who has done considerable research on these ducks, proposes to discuss the ways to save this species at the Third International Meeting on Conservation of Wildfowl Resources, to be held in Leningrad in September this year. He is attending the conference at the invitation of the Ministry of Agriculture, USSR.

Discovering two such ducks killed recently in the jungle near Pengaree and Duamara tea gardens, Mr Machenzie put forward a scheme on June 8 this year to the State Forest Department to endeavour to save the species. Owing to Mr. Machenzie's efforts the matter has also come to the notice of the International Wildfowl Trust. Dr. Dillon Ripley, President of the Smithsonian Institute of America and Mr. Peter Scott an international authority on Wild Life, are also very much concerned about the dying species, it is learnt. --- (PTI)

Notes and Comments

Birds and Trees

In the September issue of the Newsletter a reference was made to the spectacular planting effort by Telco in their new estate at Poona. In a letter to them Dr Salim Ali said:

' I hope very much that you can spare half to one acre (or more) here and there so that you have a number of scattered groves of these bird-attracting species growing like patches of natural jungle all over the place, particularly in the neighbourhood of the dammed reservoir. If some arrangement can be made to have a jungly looking pond in each of these groves for the birds to drink and bathe -- at least in the larger groves -- I think that would be an additional attraction for them in the hot weather. When the trees are sufficiently grown we can put up nest-boxes in them for the birds to breed in.

The list of plants is given below as of possible interest to those who wish to attract birds to their gardens and farms:

Ficus bengalensis, religiosa, glomerata, benjamina, mysorensis and others

Trema orientalis

Bridelia retusa

Bridelia hamiltoniana

Madhuca indica

Buchanania latifolia (' charoli ')

Muntingia calabura

Zizyphus jujuba

Zizyphus oenoplia

Santalum album

Morus spp. (mulberry)

Melia azadirachta and M. indica

Salmalia malabarica

Butea monosperma

Erythrina indica, E. lithosperma, E. suberosa

Woodfordia fruticosa

Helicteres isora

Subscription to ANIMALS

Many of our readers are familiar with this magazine. Every month Animals magazine covers all aspects of animal life -- Mammals, Birds, Fish, and Insects from all over the world -- ranging from wildlife conservation to detailed studies and observations of Animal Behaviour. With correspondents in almost every country in the world. Animals has the most comprehensive and up-to-date information service on all new wildlife developments and discoveries.

Peter Scott writes: ' Animals is of particular interest to ornithologists. Every issue contains several features on birds -- from accounts of bird-watching expeditions to reports on bird biology and behaviour. With its plentiful illustrations, I would say it is a magazine no bird-lover can do without. '

The subscription is the equivalent of £2.14.0 and intending subscribers could contact

International Book House (Prvt) Ltd.
9 Ash Lane, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Fort
Bombay 1

Correspondence

The Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla caspica*) is back in Bombay

On my ramble on 15 September 1968, I saw my first Grey Wagtail of the 1968-1969 bird migration season — a solo found feeding in the green house of the Aarey Milk Colony Plant Nursery. It was very tame, repeatedly coming within a few feet of me, and ducking off some distance the moment it felt it was too close.

The earliest and the latest dates given for the Grey Wagtail for Bombay and Salsette are: 28th September (Borivli in 1939) and 12th April (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 40: 154). During 1967-1968 bird migration season I had kept an intense watch on their arrival and departure. My first Grey Wagtail was met with on 8.x.1967 very close to where I saw this season's bird, on the edge of a grass field. The one visiting Dr Salim Ali's lawn at 46 Pali Hill, Bandra, appeared to have left on its outward journey either on the 21/iv (it was not watched being a Sunday) or on 22/iv/1968 from which date it was altogether absent from the lawn. The earliest arrival date for the present Maharashtra State I am able to find from literature is 22.viii.1912, one shot by Mr J. Donald of the Forest Department in Chikalda, 125 miles south of Sehor and identified by the Bombay Natural History Society (Journal Vol. 21: 1329).

Incidentally my first White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) for the last season was come across on 12.x.1967 (Dasera holiday) — a singleton feeding by a heap of cattle dung in the Aarey Milk Colony. A search on 15.ix.1968 of all its likely haunts in the Colony failed to reveal its presence.

J. S. Serrao

[In the 5 years 1941-46 the first Grey Wagtail was seen on a particular lawn in Bandra between 11 and 21 September (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 47: 161) — Eds.]

'Image Intensifier'

I read in the White Star that an 'Image Intensifier' has been developed in the U. S. A. This instrument magnifies light 50,000 times and if it is fitted on to a camera you can take films and photographs in the dark, and fitted on a binocular you can see as easily at night as in the daylight. We must find out more about this and try and get one. This would open out endless opportunities for watching and observing birds and animals at night for naturalists and open out new fields for them (and also unfortunately poachers, smugglers and thieves) and I hope you will try and get one. If the price is within reach then I would also like to get one for my binoculars.

Yuvraj Shivrajkumar

[Will some reader 'look into this' matter? — Ed.]

Birds visiting *Hamelia patens*

A *Hamelia patens* tree is growing in my compound at Dehra Dun. It is about 10 ft away from the verendah where my wife and I usually sit in the morning from 6 a.m. onwards for an hour or so. This tree came into bloom at the end of April and continued to be in flower for a month or two. During May and June it was a common sight to see a number of small birds such as Purple Sunbird, Tailor Bird, White-eye, and some other sunbirds flitting through the foliage pecking at the buds and flowers. The flowers are reddish in colour and tubular, ideally suited for these birds.

Since August the place of these birds has been taken by another group of creatures, the wasps. It is difficult to understand the reason for this

shift by birds from the Hamelia tree which still has flowers on it, to some other place. Although some zinnias, hibiscus, dahlia are in bloom I do not remember to have seen a concentration of such birds like these which used to visit the Hamelia. Probably the birds have found a better source of food which I have not been able to trace.

H. N. Mathur

[You might plant some of the trees referred to in Notes and Comments, particularly Muntingia calabura (Singapore Cherry). Perhaps the 'other sunbirds' to which you refer may have been Blyth's Flower Peckers. We saw very large numbers of these birds on this tree during a recent visit to Poona. — Ed.]

'Do birds have a sense of smell?'

In the last issue of the Birdwatcher's publication there was a twenty-one question quiz and I think that more of these quizzes could be published now and then, since they can be quite useful to anyone who is really interested in birdwatching. Therefore I request the Editor to allow me to make some comments on the first question - 'Do birds have a sense of smell?'

Many years ago I was questioned by some of my friends on this point, whether really birds have a sense of smell. At that time my answer, based on some of my observations and readings was, that birds have a very poor sense of smell and even perhaps some birds have no sense of smell at all. I remember on one occasion I found a dead buffalo under the culvert of a bridge and wondered why the vultures that were very plentiful in that locality and were soaring and gliding in the sky, did not dispose off the dead buffalo. A week elapsed and the carcass was in such a state of decomposition that the villas nearby requested their municipality to burn the carcass to relieve them from the unpleasant odours. The fact remains that the vultures never discovered the carcass. On another occasion following the trail of an unpleasant smell I discovered under the cover of a heavy foliage the carcass of a cow. From the information given by some villagers, the cow was killed by a panther and after a good meal the panther dragged the rest of the carcass and hid it under a bush. Since the panther did not come back to the kill the carcass remained hidden for at least a couple of days when the hyenas and jackals discovered it and devoured the carcass, but the vultures that were soaring over that area in good numbers all the time never did discover or locate the hidden carcass. Nevertheless, I remember another incident when the vultures discovered a hidden carcass by the behaviour of the jungle crows and the presence of some pariah dogs.

On one occasional I saw a 'mochhi' removing the hide of a dead buffalo it must have been about 12 noon. With the purpose of taking a few shots of the vulture feeding on the carcass, two hours and a half later I was once more on the spot where the carcass was. From a distance I noticed already the vultures perched on some nearby trees, on the ground I found only a skeleton, with a few crows and mynas with a couple of village dogs trying to feast on the tit-bits of flesh left by the vultures.

Following the principle that nature has always gifted its creatures with the most adequate means to accomplish their end the vultures should have the most elaborate and acute sense of smell. From the opinion of scientists on mammals and insects the sense of smell play quite an important part in their lives and behaviour. I do not think we can apply the same principles to the behaviour of birds.

Compiling the conclusions of experiments conducted by ornithologists I see that the tenor of my answer given many years ago has not changed much. Summarising the findings on this subject given by Nelson in the New Dictionary of Birds we read 'Birds apparently possess adequate olfactory organs. It seems possible that in some species the sense of smell is poorly developed and play little part in their lives. A great deal of conflicting evidence has accumulated by research and experiments..

A. Navarro, S. J.

..... 11

Sense of smell in birds

The answer to the first question of the 'Twenty-one questions' by R. A. S. Melliush (Newsletter, Vol. 8(9), September 1968, pp. 1, 6) states that birds have well-developed sense of smell. I am afraid this is not correct. All recent books on avian biology clearly say that although some birds have a sense of smell, it is very poorly developed. In this connection, 'An introduction to Ornithology' by Wallace and Fundamentals of Ornithology by Van Tyne and Berger may be consulted.

The New Dictionary of Birds (p. 765), however, states 'that further experiments are necessary before we may reach any definite conclusion about the sense of smell in birds.'

S. S. Saha

Wild Life Laws in Calcutta

In course of his comments (Hornbill, Newsletter of the Bombay Natural History Society — May-June 1968) on the book POURTRAIT OF A DESERT by Guy Montford, Sri K. S. Lavkumar has made some interesting observations which deserve attention.

I, for one, fully agree with him when he says that the Society should stretch itself and demand its rightful position in the country. I also believe that only the studies conducted by the Society can provide the right answer for the problem of food production in the country. Ecology is proving to be a subject of utmost importance, particularly, for a country like India where agriculture is basically the most important economic operation still.

The old and established truth that the conservation of the flora and fauna is vitally important for stemming the deterioration of the productivity of the land is presumably a common knowledge now. But the destruction of both the flora and fauna is still going on almost unchecked all over the country. I would narrate here my brief experience of these destructions when recently I went down to Frazerganj, a place about 100 km. away from Calcutta. This is the farthest point one can reach directly south of Calcutta. Beyond this lies the boundless sea. Now, throughout my journey to this place, I did not see a single tree of any markedly large size or girth, which means young growth signifying that the area which was once a part of the mighty forest of the Sunderbans must have been opened out only recently. All around I found open plains of indifferent cultivation interspersed with ugly and mean human tenements amidst mean domestic vegetation. The famous forests of the Sunderbans were nowhere to be seen. As far as the eyes could reach, the destruction of the forest was thorough and complete. Sooner or later such vast changes in the topography of a region are bound to produce effects and if some of those effects prove calamitous in the end, we shall have only ourselves to thank for that.

I would write now on another aspect of the destruction that is being systematically conducted around Calcutta. This concerns a large number of birds which are brought to Calcutta to be sold as food for the city's sophisticated inhabitants. A few months ago I chanced to meet a man on Rashbehari Avenue, a so-called elite area of the city, with a bunch of birds, all dead, hanging from a stick in his hand. On closer inspection, the birds turned out to be Indian Moorhens, some Crakes and also Rails, the birds numbering about four dozen, the moorhens predominating. These were being hawked as items of delicacy and, doubtless, had a ready market in the locality. When I questioned the man how he secured so many birds, he told me that these birds were trapped in large numbers near Port Canning, about 50 km. from Calcutta from where they were despatched to wholesalers of the various markets of Calcutta from whom these were sold to retailers, some of whom had stalls inside the markets, and others who

were less fortunate, hawked them from door to door like the man I came across. The number of birds sent each day from only one locality of Port Canning, at the height of season, was more than five hundred pairs. When one considers this depredation with the fact that because of refugee rehabilitation, extension of cultivation and fisheries and grazing, the natural habitat of all these moorland birds is becoming restricted, one grimly realizes the fact that it is now only a matter of days when all these beautiful birds will be just past history — a thoughtless sacrifice to the gluttony and cupidity of man.

I bring all this to your notice so that the attention of all right thinking persons is drawn towards it and something is done to put some sort of check so that the forests are saved and also these pretty and interesting and delightful birds.

A. S. Bhaduri

Intelligence of a pair of Koels (*Eudynamis scolopacea*)

Last year during the month of May, the following interesting trick played by a pair of koels was observed by me.

A female House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) was sitting in the nest on a coconut tree and the male crow was sitting nearby on another. At that moment a male koel appeared on the scene. First the male crow alone began chasing the koel away but the koel kept dodging the crow and would not leave the neighbourhood. Then the female crow too joined the mission. At this moment the koel moved a short distance of about 60 yards, but did not allow the crow to give up the chase. Immediately the female crow too left the nest and joined her mate. A female koel probably hiding and watching these proceedings emerged out suddenly from a nearby bush and entered into the crow's nest silently like a thief, while her mate kept engaged the true owners of the nest at a distance. After 3 or 4 minutes, the female koel came out of the nest and silently vanished into the bushes. Only then did it give an all-clear call which was obviously audible to the male koel and the male koel then stopped engaging the crows. Later it joined the male and the crows too came back to the nest with least suspicion. The female crow took back its position in the nest.

It was not possible for me to see exactly what the koel did in the nest but my inference was that the koel laid her egg and it was all a pre-planned trick which seemed to be most ingenious. I regret I could not continue my observations because I had to leave the place soon after.

K. S. R. Krishna Raju
Visakhapatnam, A. P.

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32-A Juhu Lane
Andheri, Bombay 58-A5

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 8—No. 11—1968 November





The train moved on and was soon on an embankment with rice fields on both sides. There were innumerable Tad Palm trees dividing the fields. Here I could see many Palm Swifts, Cypsiurus parvus circling and soaring with great ease, well above the palm trees. The wings were beaten with a slightly stiff up and down motion and held out to form a crescent. The birds soared wheeled and glided, fluttering the wings to maintain speed and altitude. One very noticeable feature was the longish tails which were forked. The fork was spread out a little every time the bird banked or turned and again closed as soon as this manoeuvre was completed.

The general coloration of the birds was sooty brown. It was difficult to see the backs of these birds unless I was on a high embankment and until a bird flew low and banked to reveal its back. There was definitely no white to be seen at all.

Like in most birds or animals the back is darker than the belly but even so the back is brown and not black.

Obviously these Palm Swifts nested in the Palm fronds on which they were so dependent. The fact that Weaver Birds and Mynas also nested in the same tree did not seem to bother them.

The way to remember the identification of these two swifts is to think of the Palm Swift as the swift with the forked tail, the forked tail being forked like the fronds of the Palm Tree on which it lives. The House Swift is distinguished by its white rump but cannot be called the Whiterumped Swift for that would be another bird belong to the Himalayas and which I have not seen.

All along the railway lines ran the telegraph lines but neither House Swift nor Palm Swift perched on them. All four toes being directed forward birds could only cling to the rough surfaces of stone walls or palm. In case one sees a swift-like bird perching on wires one can be sure that the bird is not a swift. On the other hand the Common Hirundo rustica, which is a migratory bird is prone to perching

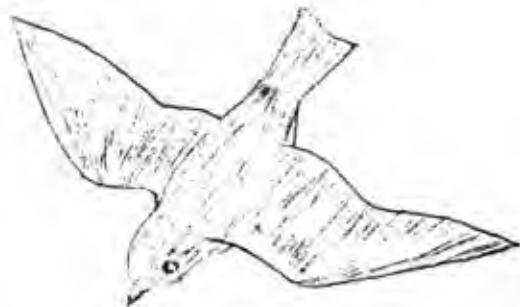
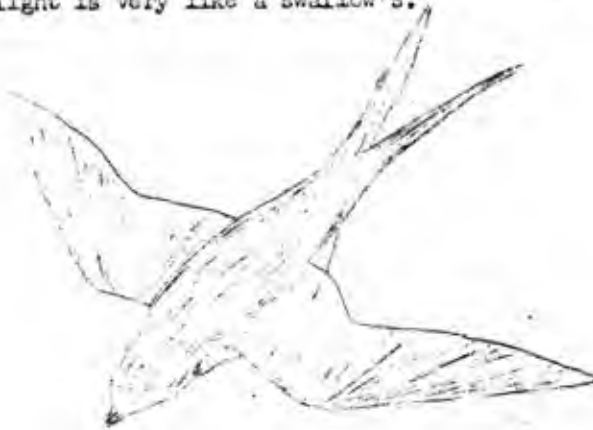
At times many hundreds may be seen sociably perching on wires.

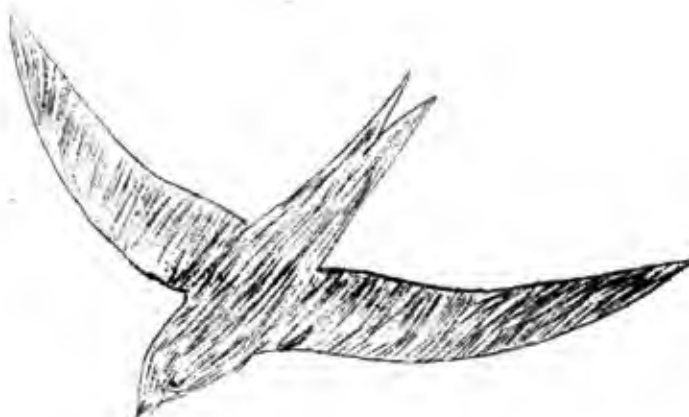
All swifts, swallows and martins exist by catching tiny winged insects in mid-air. The insects are swallowed in mid-air and the birds hawk about and fly for hours without resting their wings. Although the swifts are akin to the humming bird and swallows and martins belong to the order of perching birds, their feeding habits are the same. Therefore, the process of evolution has produced end product with great similarity. This common feeding habit draws these birds to the same hunting grounds.

There are many small hills of barren aspect in the environs of Bombay and Poona. A few palm trees grow at the base of these hills. By standing at a position of vantage on one of these hills it is possible to clearly see the backs as well as the bellies of swallows hawking up and down. One very good hill is the one with the Kanheri caves at the National Park at Borivli, Bombay. Some of the caves are used by the Redrumped Swallow, Hirundo daurica for nesting. The pitcher-shaped nests of clay are skillfully stuck to the roofs of the caves.

The swallows are to be seen flying about with graceful sweeps of their wings. In the downstroke the wings are distinctly swept back. A few easy strokes with the wing is followed by a glide. The long forked tail is also distinctive. The upper surface of the bird is a glossy blueblack with a chestnut rump which at times is a faded colour. The entire under surface of the body of this bird is a pale pink colour and serves to distinguish it from the Common Swallow which has a chestnut throat (sometimes faded) followed by a black chest band and then the pale pink belly. The Common Swallow lacks the red rump on its dorsal surface but has the same blue black wings. The Common Swallow being a migratory species is able to fly with greater ease than any of the other birds under our immediate consideration. In the best of specimens the forked tail is really magnificent.

On a lucky day in the winter months one can come across a large number of swifts and swallows and in the thrill and confusion that this sight offers one is likely to overlook a few Dusky Crag Martins, Hirundo concolor. This is really a small swallow of sooty brown aspect both above and below. Its short unforked tail has white spots at the end of most feathers and these can be seen when the bird fans out its tail for banking and turning. Its flight is very like a swallow's.





Dr Salim Ali says in his The Book of Indian Birds, ' In winter the migratory Crag Martin (Hirundo rupestris) is also found in association with our resident birds. It is slightly larger and paler, and is readily distinguishable by its whitish underparts.

Mention must be made of the Wiretailed Swallow (Hirundo smithii) which is easily identified by the long wire-like appendages to its tail and by its very white underparts. The Indian Cliff Swallow (Hirundo fluviicola) is a very small swallow of martin-like appearance. The back of the bird is blue-black with a chestnut crown. The whitish underparts and the pale brown legs are identification points.

For the purpose of identification, it will be very useful if the observer can locate the nests of these birds. Often the nests are built in large colonies and each bird builds its distinctive type of nest making use of mud, feathers and saliva.

The Indian Sand-Martin (Hirundo paludicola) which is described in detail by Hugh Whistler makes its nest by burrowing into sandbanks. The earthy brown colour of its back and the whitish underparts are similar in general aspect to that of the migratory Crag Martin. The Indian bird is much smaller, however, and is found in the vicinity of streams and sandbanks.

One day I hope to acquire sufficient knowledge to be able to draw all the nests. As nest building is an inherited quality, each bird is able to produce its own type in an unerring manner without any previous training.

Meanwhile, the attached table has been prepared to summarize our observations

<u>Bird</u>	<u>Back</u>	<u>Rump</u>	<u>Tail</u>	<u>Underparts</u>
House Swift (<u>Apus affinis</u>)	sooty black	white	short (Remarks: white throat)	sooty black
Palm Swift (<u>Cypsiurus parvus</u>)	sooty brown	..	forked	sooty brown
Redrumped Swallow (<u>Hirundo daurica</u>)	blueblack	chestnut to faded buff	long and forked	pale pink
Common Swallow (<u>Hirundo rustica</u>)	blueblack	..	long and forked (Remarks: chestnut throat)	black chestband: pale pink

<u>Bird</u>	<u>Back</u>	<u>Rump</u>	<u>Tail</u>	<u>Underparts</u>
Dusky Crag Martin (<u>Hirundo concolor</u>)	dark brown	..	short (Remarks: white spots on tail)	brown
Crag Martin (<u>Hirundo rupestris</u>)	brown	..	short	dirty white
Indian Cliff Swallow (<u>Hirundo fluviicola</u>)	blueblack	pale brown	..	white (Remarks: chestnut crown)

[Some of our readers may be familiar with Stray Feathers, the remarkable journal of ornithology, edited by Allan Hume for many years in the last quarter of the last century. The following excerpts are copied from Volume 3 of January 1875, and will help to corroborate or add to what the writer has written above. — Ed.]

The Swallows and Swifts of Berar

By

James Aitken

I have never observed the English House Swallow, H. rustica (which is so abundant in Bombay throughout the whole cold season), in Berar.

The Wire-tailed Swallow, (H. filifera.) [Now: Hirundo smithii]

This species supplies in Berar the place of rustica, which it so strongly resembles in its habits. It seems to be even fonder of water, indeed it rarely leaves it, skimming over the surface with a speed matching that of the Swift, its metallic colours flashing in the sun. It is a permanent resident, and breeds from February till June. The nest is a mere shallow saucer built under a rock or wall, sometimes even an earthen bank at the water side, and it exhibits in the construction all the forethought and patience of its English relative. The first nest I watched took four weeks to complete, a narrow layer of mud being added cautiously each day, and left to dry. When this part of the business was complete, a lining of fine grass was added, then one of feathers, and on this were laid three long-shaped eggs, of a white colour, well spotted with dark reddish brown. I confess to having been guilty of the cruelty of taking two of these for my collection, but the faithful little bird continued still to sit, and I had afterwards the satisfaction of seeing the remaining egg hatched and the young one fledged. Long after they are able to fly, the young are fed in the air by the old birds exactly after the manner of the English Swallow, parents and young circling round and round, and then, with a complacent twitter, clinging together for an instant, during which the mouthful of insects is transferred from the one to the other.

The Mosque Swallow, (H. erythropygia.) [Now: Hirundo daurica]

This is one of those birds which seem highly to appreciate the advantages of civilisation, and to think, like Cowper's cat, that men take a great deal of trouble to please them. In Berar they have almost discarded the mosques which gave them their name, and have betaken themselves to the culverts of the roads, which are now being constructed all over the country. Wherever a road is made, some of the culverts are sure to be taken possession of, and soon as the rains commence, by pairs of these Swallows, which may be seen darting in at one end and out at the other, or hawking about for flies over the pools of water at the road side; their flight has, however, nothing of the extreme rapidity of that of the Swifts or Wire-tailed Swallows. During the cold season the young often assemble in large flocks, but these all disperse, or perhaps migrate, as the weather gets warmer, and only a few pairs remain to breed during the monsoon. The nest is of mud, with a profligate entrance running along the wall, and is lined with coarse grass and feathers. The eggs are long shaped, and pure white, without spot of any kind. In the subterraneous situation in which the nest is so often placed, and with the

is still further excluded by the long neck, it is a marvel how the young escape suffocation.

The Cliff Swallow, (H. fluvicola.)

The smallest of our Swallows, and much less familiarly known than the other species, as it lives in colonies, and is strictly confined to certain localities: at Akola there is one of these colonies, which build their nests under a broken portion of a wall which stretches out into the Moorna; the nests are retort shaped; a few stand apart, but the majority are attached together, the tubular necks all standing out from the wall, and presenting a very peculiar appearance. With the first heavy showers of the monsoon the river comes down in a flood, and washed the whole place clean; as soon as the rains abate, rebuilding commences, and the hustle in the early morning is prodigious, the birds hurrying from all quarters with their bills full of mud. They are much persecuted by sparrows, who take possession of the egg cup of the nest before the neck is added, and a single pair will cause several nests to be deserted by the others. As soon as the nests are finished the eggs are laid, and when hatched the birds simply throw the eggshells into the water instead of carrying them to a distance, as is done by most birds, aware, apparently, that the stream will carry them away. I have noticed this also in the case of the weaver bird. The second brood is in February, during which month they swarm about the nests like bees about a hive, while every now and then splash into the water goes some too fragile neck, breaking even under the light weight of the little owner. These breakages do not, however, interfere in the least with the process of incubation, but appear to be repaired even while the mother bird is sitting. The eggs are two, sometimes three, in number, of a white colour, spotted with faint red; I have seen some, however, pure white; they vary greatly both in colour and size. After the young quit the nest, they associate in a large flock, playing about over the surface of the water, and drinking frequently as they fly. The old birds do not by any means confine themselves to the water, but spread freely over the country, and sing much on the wing. Their flight is comparatively feeble.

The Dusky Crag Martin, (Cotile concolor.) [Now: Hirundo concolor]

The natural habitat of this Swallow is amongst rocks, and on the faces of cliffs, and in such situations it may always be found, but it readily avails itself of the windows and porches of houses, even nesting among the two-storied houses in native towns. I have also known it make its nest on the side of a well. The nest is open all round, merely attached to the wall by one side, and is very neatly lined with feathers. The eggs are more round than those of any of our other Swallows, and are minutely speckled with brown, especially about the thick end; the usual number is, I think, three. They are persecuted while building, and occasionally driven away by the Sparrows, but their open nest not being adapted to the wants of these birds, they do not take possession of it. Though capable, from their length of wing, of great speed, they are no travellers, but may generally be found flying about their chosen cliff or building in a very leisurely manner; the young continue about the spot for some time, but I never saw the old ones feed them upon the wing after the manner of the Wire-tailed Swallows.

The Indian Swift, (Cypselus affinis.) [Now: Apus affinis]

This bird is of course abundant, and its rushing flight and shrill cry often strongly recall summer evenings at home. Its habits are indeed but a feeble copy of those of the English bird, the same circling near their nests, always screaming as they pass them, and the same, assembling in numbers high in the air in the evening, though they fly low much more frequently. They breed once in February, and again during the monsoon. The nests are probably better known than those of any other Indian Swift or Swallow; they are generally built under roofs, sometimes in a crevice between the wall and the roof, but often attached to the roof itself. In the latter case the straws of which the nest is composed are so firmly agglutinated that it tears like a piece of matting; and it is generally ornamented without, as well as lined within, with feathers. Two or three long, white eggs are laid. The young, like those of the English Swift, never become perchers, but take boldly to the wing whenever they leave the nest, returning to it when fatigued until they acquire their full powers. Numbers take possession of the porches and verandahs, where these

are high enough, of the cutcherries and other large buildings now erected all over the land, and fly backwards and forwards, building their nests, or tending their young, totally regardless of the crowd that may be moving below. It is no uncommon thing to see the top of an archway covered with their nests, all closely packed together; but where there is ample accommodation, as in a cutcherry verandah, each nest usually stands apart.

The Palm Swift, (C. batassiensis.) [Now: Cypsiurus parvus]

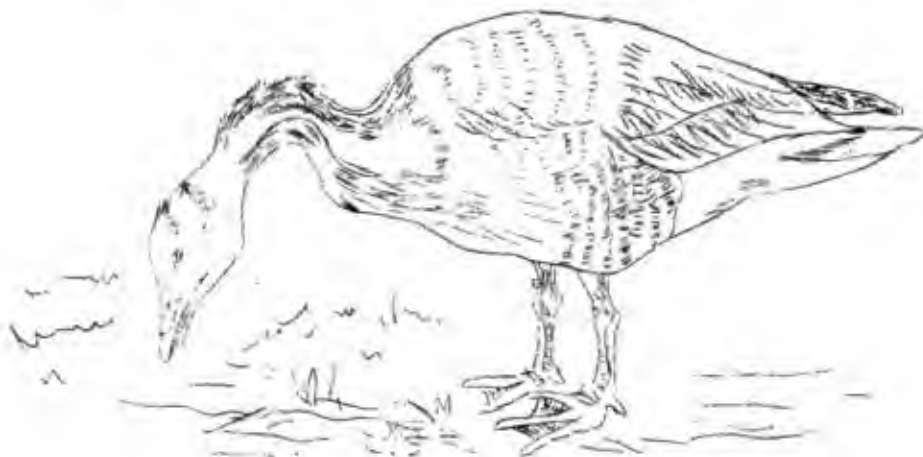
Palm trees are scarce in Berar, but wherever a solitary one rears its head there may be found the Palm Swift flying round and round it. I once, and once only, saw several of these birds flying about a grove of mangotrees where there was not a palm tree within miles. As is well known, it attaches its nest to the leaf of the coconut or toddy palm, but I have never succeeded in procuring either the nest or eggs.]

The Barheaded Goose (Anser indicus) in captivity

By

T. J. Roberts

Readers might be interested to learn something more about the sketch of two Barheaded geese which has recently appeared on the cover of the Newsletter. They are a pair (the two sexes are almost indistinguishable) out of four which were captured during the winters of 1964/65 and 1965/66 on the Chenab river just upstream from the MARALA BARRAGE which is within sight of the magnificent snow-capped Pir Panjal mountains.



Judging from the written accounts of explorers and travellers in the high deserts plateaus of central Asia where the Barheaded Goose breeds, temperatures of up to 104° F (Carruthers, D. Beyond the Caspian, 1949) do occur during the short summer. Khanewal where these geese are kept, has a hot desert climate with very little monsoon influence and except for its longer duration and severe intensity, I do not suppose the summer climate here to be markedly different from that prevailing in some of the areas where the Barhead breeds. In this respect they must be better adapted to withstand heat than the Siberian breeding species of Grey geese which comprise the rest of the Anserinae visiting this subcontinent in winter. Nevertheless, when a friend gave these geese to me twelve months ago, it was with considerable apprehension that I viewed their spending a summer in Khanewal and I am relieved to be able to report that they have passed the summer in apparent excellent health and conditions.

As a protection against jackals and Jungle Cats, both common in the vicinity the geese are penned at night in a completely wired aviary. By day they graze on one of the lawns. They drink water freely throughout the feeding period, and besides grass, they are fed unhusked rice and sorghum (Bajra) and they also relish chappatis. As has been observed elsewhere, a rigid hierarchy or pecking order is soon established and one individual Barhead

always claims first access to their food when it is filled, as well as bathing rights in their pond.

By the middle of February they become very fat and this is even noticeable in the thickening of their necks. In West Pakistan I have observed that by the end of February they start their northward migration and it is very noticeable that these captive geese completely went off their feed at the end of February and could not be tempted even with new varieties of food. They did not resume eating normally for 2 or 3 weeks and it appears that this behaviour is associated with the physiological changes which accompany the urge to migrate and the need to build up fat reserves before the long northern journey, and that the fasting may also be internally regulated by similar physiological processes.

The once yearly moult is also an astonishing process. In about the second week of July the first primary feathers are shed and within the space of only three days all even primaries on each wing drop out and the birds are completely flightless. Molt of the retrices and secondaries follow rapidly and in the wild, they must rely upon the inaccessible nature of the marshy fringes of the lakes which are characteristic of their breeding grounds, as otherwise they would be vulnerable to all sorts of predators including wolves which occur in that area. The new flight feathers do not complete their growth until about August 15th so that the Barheaded geese are without the ability to fly for about 3½ weeks.

Experiments (Lasher and Kendeigh, 'Effect of photoperiod on molting of feathers' 1941) have shown that the shedding of the feathers is brought about in some species by the changing length of daylight and darkness and this seems to apply particularly to the Anserinae. Since this effect would be less apparent in the more southerly latitude of their present captivity (Khanewal is approximately 30°N whilst their breeding grounds extend from 36° N to 42°N) it would therefore not be safe to assume that moult in the wild state follows the same time pattern as given above.

Amongst wild birds, the geese are well known for their intelligence and though regrettably my Barheads have paid little attention to my attempts to be friendly, yet they never fail to greet with low calls, my passing mail who is responsible for their food dish!

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Our Club has again sent a subscription of £5/- to the International Council for Bird Preservation. There will be a meeting of the International Council for Bird Preservation in November 1969 just before or after the General Assembly meeting of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Further particulars about this meeting will be given in our Newsletter in due course.

* * *

The Planning Commission called a meeting in August to consider measures to be taken for Wild Life Preservation during the 4th Plan period. Mrs Usha Ganguli was present at the meeting, made a strong plea for converting Najafgarh Jheel near Delhi into a bird sanctuary because of its rich bird life. We trust appropriate steps will be taken in this direction.

* * *

It is reliably understood that the Department of Tourism (Government of India) is allocating funds for the development of the Karnala Bird Sanctuary. Steps will be taken to put up a couple of huts with adequate water supply for which a tube well will be dug, and a nature trail leading up to the Fort will enable visitors to get a good view of the Sanctuary and its bird and animal life. It is to be hoped that 'development' will be undertaken in an imaginative way so that the essential characteristics of this beautiful forest are in no way destroyed. The National Park Service of the United States of America has, at the request of the Editor, sent plans and drawings

: 12 :

of suitable hutments and structures which are designed for National Parks in the United States of America, and these are being followed by the Tourist Department for guidance in putting up structures at Karnala, Tulsi, and other places.

* * *

N O T I C E

of the Annual General Meeting

The 9th Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India will be held at the residence of Mr Zafar Futehally, Juhu Lane, Andheri, at 5 p. m. on Saturday, the 21st December 1968.

/ more
interesting It is requested that all those who are in a position to come, attend this meeting and give us the benefit of their views on making the Newsletter and new activities of the Club.

A formal notice of the meeting with the agenda will appear in the December 1968 issue.

CORRESPONDENCE

The appearance of an Oyster Catcher (?) at Colaba Sea Coast

On 15th September a bird slightly bigger than the Redwattled Lapwing was found on the cement bund facing Nariman Point feeding on the fish spread to dry in the morning sun. At times it took rest standing on one leg. On closer approach I observed water drops forming at the tip of its beak, sometimes falling down unnoticed, sometimes the bird annoyingly swinging off the water drops.

Bill slender, long and straight, coloured orange-red at base, black towards the tip. Forehead and crest roudish. Head, throat, neck and tail black in colour. Underparts and border of wings white; upper portion coffee brown. A white line right on the throat didnt appear to have reached round the nape. Through my glass, legs looked purple in colour. Hind toe non-existing.

Was it a sick bird; if not, what does the water-dripping signify?

T. V. Jose
Colaba, Bombay 5

The Rain Quail (*Coturnix coromandelicus*)

In the October issue of the Newsletter Kameshwar P. D. Singh has mentioned that his captive birds are heard calling only at night, but these quails also call during the day hours in the wild state and during the rainy season their double note is one of the commonest sounds in the countryside. It is true however that they are most heard at dawn and dusk and throughout the day mainly when the weather is overcast. Possibly in captivity the birds are a little shy and therefore do not call. Of course the crepuscular habits of the Rain Quail make it even shyer in captivity.

This little game bird is very numerous during the SW. monsoon and probably is a local migrant spreading out during the breeding season from areas of concentration where there is more cover and food during the drier part of the year.

The small size and skulking habits of this little bird make it difficult to locate and it is able to find shelter in grass along verges of fields.

Apart from its characteristic calls which reveal its presence in the locality, birdwatcher may largely see it when he accidentally come across it and flushes it by almost stepping onto it.

K. S. Lakshman

Blackbacked Woodpecker (*Chrysocolaptes festivus*) in Andhra Pradesh

The most startling discovery of all my time in India has presented itself within the last month, with my identification of a pair of Blackbacked Woodpeckers (*Chrysocolaptes festivus* Bodd.). They are apparently resident birds — I probably have seen them before, assuming they were golden-backs.

But on August 30, 1968, a pair was feeding (and later the male was chasing after the female) in the mangoes just outside my window, some 20 ft off the ground, affording me an opportunity for close scrutiny. I immediately noted that these birds were different from any golden-backs I had seen before, and I made a sketch of their distinctive features on the spot.

The thing that distinguished the male was a large white 'triangular' patch on its upper back. And the female had a deep golden-yellow crest, not quite so prominent in size as the male's bright crimson one.

I waited for another opportunity to observe them, to make absolutely certain of what I had seen. Then, on September 19, 1968, they appeared outside again, this time in full sunlight, and now there was no mistaking their coloration: both birds had white upper back, black backs, and wings that became golden-yellow only on the central and outer portions; the female had a golden crest — deep, solid golden, without a trace of another colour in it.

They were finally driven from the deadwood top of the large mango they were in by a pugnacious crimson-breasted barbet which was excavating its nest cavity in one of the branch stubs!

As the woodpeckers had black rumps, instead of crimson, as the only other golden-backed species I then knew of have, I presumed they were colour mutants.

The next day, on September 20, 1968, however, quite by accident, I came across Baker's and Inglis's description of the black-backed woodpecker in their The Birds of Southern India (Madras, 1930); and knew then this was the bird I had seen.

A couple of other points of information they mentioned made me wait for another close-at-hand sighting, however; and this I had today: the male I saw just now had a distinctly striped (not spotted) chin and throat, and a whitish forehead — I could not tell if it was composed of large white spots on a brown background, as Baker and Inglis denote. I had previously noted both birds were distinctly striped black-and-white underneath.

This morning I saw the male at what is apparently an old nesting hole about 20 ft off the ground in a nearby coconut palm, pecking vigorously. I do not know if this indicates nesting plans, as I have seen woodpeckers at similar holes before, with no nesting following.

Ripley gives the range of *Chrysocolaptes festivus festivus* (Boddaert) as 'The Western Ghats strip from the Surat Dangs and Khandesh area in Bombay south to Kerala, east along the Satpura mountain trend through central India, north to Dehra Dun in U. P., Bihar, and West Bengal.'

I am pleased to report this range may now be extended to include northern Hyderabad district, Andhra Pradesh.

George F. Neavill

'Treetops', Medchal, Hyderabad Dist,
Andhra Pradesh

26.ix.1968

I I

' Image Intensifier '

Apropos of the ' Image Intensifier ' mentioned by Yuvraj Shivrajkumar in the latest issue of Newsletter [Vol. 8(10)], I wonder whether he could furnish more details of the source of his information. Being in a profession where one has to keep abreast with latest developments in science and technology, I would like to know more about it.

There have, of course, been some recent developments in infra-red and ' heat ray ' photography where special cameras have been used with films sensitive only to thermal radiations. Pictures taken in total darkness have shown silhouettes of heat radiating objects (including human beings) against a dark background. However, these are still in the experimental stage and nowhere near commercial production. They might even get ' classified ' for security reasons. LIFE magazine published some ' heat-ray ' photographs a few months ago.

But I am not quite sure that the device described by the Yuvraj, particularly the miniature variety that could be fitted to binoculars, is still in the realms of science fiction.

V. G. Kartha
4B/1, Sector 9, Bhilai I

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32 Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 8-No. 12-1968 December



NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 8, No. 12

December 1968

The Annual Waterfowl Count. Conducted by C. D. W. Savage, Chairman, International Wildfowl Census, Lahore	1
A Flamingo-hunter's Journal: Part Two. By R. A. Stewart Melliush ..	4
The Black Eagle (<u>Ictinaetus malayensis</u> <u>perdiger</u>) within Bombay limits. By V. Udaya Shankar Rao	6
Birdwatching at Matheran. By Vipin Parikh	6
Annual General Meeting - Notice	7
Extracts from THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER, Number 14, July 1968. Interna- tional Council for Bird Preservation	8
Notes and Comments	9

Correspondence:

Blue Rock Thrush visiting the Indian Museum gardens. By S. S. Saha
(p. 10); House Sparrow (Passer domesticus) nesting in trees. By J. S.
Serrao (p. 11); Divali Greetings. By K. S. Lavkumar (p. 11); Chilka
Lake Survey. By J. C. Daniel (p. 12); Rain Quail. By Mrs Raj Bedi
(p. 12); Chilka Lake Survey. By R. A. Stewart Melliush (p. 12);
Parakeets: Flights to roosts. By Bahadur A. Palkhiwalla (p. 12)

The Annual Waterfowl Count

Conducted by C. D. W. Savage, Chairman
International Wildfowl Census, Lahore

From all accounts the returns of waterfowl counts submitted from various
areas last year provided valuable data about numbers of different species.
Those in a position to help must send in their returns this year also,
and the count must be undertaken this season on Sunday, 15th January
1969.

The form is enclosed in this Newsletter, and Mr S. V. Nilakanta has drawn
some sketches of the commoner duck to help identification. It is not
necessary to send in impressive totals of birds to make any returns
valuable. What is of the highest importance is that the identifications
should be correct, and if there is any doubt about what has been seen it
is best to say so. Volume 1 of the Handbook of the Birds of India and
Pakistan, by Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley, contains the section on Anatidae
and the coloured plates and descriptions will be useful for identification.

Please send your returns to the Editor of the Newsletter, who will pass
them on to Mr Christopher Savage in Pakistan.

INTERNATIONAL WILDFOWL CENSUS

Mid-January 1968

The Wildfowl Survey

11-F Gulberg, Lahore, W. Pakistan

COUNTRY		District				
Place	(1)	(2)				
(3)	(4)	(5)				
DATE	Species Code	Total No. (1)	Total No. (2)	Total No. (3)	Total No. (4)	Total No. (5)
DALLARD	0720					
TEAL	0750					
GARGANEY	0740					
GADGALL	0820					
WITSON	0800					
PINTAIL	0780					
SNOVILLER	0830					
HARLEED TEAL	0790					
RED-CRESTED POCHARD	0850					
SCAUP	0890					
TUFTED DUCK	0870					
COMMON POCARD	0860					
WHITE-EYED POCHARD	0880					
GOLDEN EYE	0900					
LONGTAILED	0930					
V. SCOTER	0920					
C. SCOTER	0980					
REMANSEY	1060					
GOCANDEY	1050					
SEAG	1040					
COMMON SILLACK	0710					
RUDY SILLACK	0700					
WHITE-CROWNED DUCK	1020					

of 20-30 birds which came in the evening and settled on a leafless tree in the compound of our hotel. They seemed to be Eastern Grey Wagtails but seeing them in the shadows of the evening and a little far from water gave us some doubt about their identity. The next day however the same flock returned and we could confirm our observation in sunny light with its wagging tail and yellow underparts. Actually this particular flock passed by every evening throughout our stay. It was also on the same leafless tree that we spotted a Shikra sitting still on a branch.

On the second day, we could see a Malebar Whistling Thrush with its glistening cobalt blue on the wings. We wished we could have heard its whistling song.

All these days, we had been listening to the kutroo ... kutroo ... of the Green Barbets. On the third and rest of the days we could spot and see both the Large and the Small Green Barbet. It would have been difficult to differentiate between the two purely on the basis of their note, but the peculiar orange skin round the eyes of the larger one made it easy to identify. The smaller one was however more abundant and easy to spot.

It was while going to the Porcupine Point that we came across that beautiful bird: the Paradise Flycatcher. For a while it sat still but then flew around with agility.

It was near the Artist Point that we saw the Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch running like a mouse and the Blueheaded Rock Thrush with chestnut underparts and a white bar on its wing showing prominently. It was also here, accidentally, that we heard and saw at leisure the beautiful sterna with its melodious song.

The commoner birds were the Redvented Bulbul and the Rufousbacked Shrike. The drongo we could see but once.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NOTICE

The Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Club of India will be held at the residence of Mr Zafar Futehally, at Juhu Lane, Andhari, at 5 p. m., on Saturday, 4th January 1969. (In the last Newsletter it was stated that the meeting would be held on 21st December 1968. Kindly note the change to 4th January 1969.)

A g e n d a

1. To elect a Chairman of the meeting.
2. To get a report from the Honorary Secretary about the working of the Club during 1968.
3. To elect office bearers for 1969.*
4. Any other business brought forward with the permission of the Chairman.

Those members who are unable to attend may kindly send in their written suggestions to the Honorary Secretary in good time for consideration at the meeting.

It will be appreciated if those who intend to come inform the Honorary Secretary in advance so that we do not fall short of refreshments and seating accommodation.

Extracts from THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER, Number 14, July 1968.
International Council for Bird Preservation

The Monkey-eating Eagle
A controversy which led to good results

An announcement in December 1967 that three immature monkey-eating Eagles had been brought from the Philippines and sent to be trained to catch rabbits at the Earl of Bradford's estate, Weston Park, Shropshire, was given wide publicity both through a B. B. C. broadcast interview and in the press. The news that three specimens of the rarest Eagle in the world, which is protected by law in the Philippines, had been exported caused much surprise and concern not only in Britain but in other countries. Full details and copies of the press statements were sent to Professor Rabor, Research Professor of the Mindanao State University and representative of the International Council for Bird Preservation in the Philippines. He immediately took up the matter with the authorities in the Philippines, particularly with regard to how a permit for the export of these birds had been granted. There were conflicting statements as to the identification of the birds concerned. The Philippine press gave great publicity to the affair and considerable controversy and public feeling arose.

In the meantime, following on further publicity and photographs of the birds in the British Press, doubts were felt as to the correctness of their identification and in a television interview the custodian of the birds at Weston Park stated that although they had been received as true Monkey-eating Eagles, and although they were believed so to be, there was now doubt about their identity.

Professor Rabor requested the British Section ICBP for an accurate identification and stated that whether the controversial birds in England were monkey-eating Eagles or not, a very important development for conservation, not only of this species in particular but also for Philippine wildlife as a whole, had resulted in the awakening of the Filipinos to the cause of conservation and this might be the beginning of real conservation measures in that country.

With the kind consent and full co-operation of the Earl of Bradford Mr D. W. Reid-Henry, an expert on Asiatic birds of prey, and Mr J. J. Tealund, Curator of Birds of the Zoological Society of London, visited Weston Park and were shown the birds. They were able to state at once that these birds were not Monkey-eating Eagles Pithecopogon jefferyi, but juvenile Fish-eagles Haliaeetus leucogaster, male and female, and the third bird a Brahmany Kite Haliastur indus. This information was sent to Professor Rabor.

One of the upshots of the controversy regarding the export of three specimens of the monkey-eating Eagle to Great Britain was a bill sponsored by the Parks and Wildlife Office to be presented to the Congress of the Philippine Republic to give greater protection to these birds including a measure to assign areas as reserves, and declaring the Monkey-eating Eagle as the National Bird of the Philippines, and even specifying penal provisions for violators of this law.

In addition to the proposed legislation for better preservation of the monkey-eating Eagles Professor Rabor, for twelve months from June 1968, will carry out further studies on the life of this bird with a view to its conservation (a continuation of the research project conducted 1963-64). Further studies of its biology and ecology will yield important data which can be used immediately for more effective conservation of this species, including the selection of reserve areas where it can be assured of continued existence.

A total of 3000 dollars is required for this project and thanks to a generous grant from the National Audubon Society to the central funds the ICBP was able at once to send 720 dollars to pay the salary of a

field assistant for twelve months. The U. S. Section of the ICBP has contributed 500 dollars and the balance has been raised by the President, Professor Dillon Ripley. It is most gratifying that by this quick cooperation the important work essential for the future of the Monkey-eating Eagle has been able to go forward without delay.

Transport and Trade in Wild Birds

At the meeting of the Pan-American Section ICBP in Venezuela in March 1968 the Chairman of the Colombian National Section, Dr C. Lehmann, drew attention to the great traffic in wild birds from Columbia. He mentioned that in one shipment of birds to New York there were 28,000 birds and that more shipments were to come. He added that ten times that number die before shipment, also they are badly packed sometimes thirty birds to a small cage — they are not fed and die rapidly. He estimated that fifty died for every bird that reached its destination. Great Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium were other sources of demand. This report was received with great concern and a resolution calling for strict control of this traffic was adopted. Dr. Lehmann's report was again considered at the Conference of the European Continental Section held in Hungary in May 1968 and the following recommendation was unanimously agreed:

'Having noted the increase of commercial traffic in live wild birds —
'Recommends that ICBP should convene an international meeting on a world scale to discuss the question of excessive commercial traffic in live wild birds and to press for measures to reduce, strictly regulate and control the import of live wild birds.'

The Air Line Companies have for many years shown great concern regarding the conditions of transport of wild birds and the International Air Transport Association set up a special Study Group on this subject. As reported in the President's Letter No. 11, in January 1967 the British Section ICBP organized an informal conference on conditions of transport and importation of live birds. The papers presented at this meeting together with the discussion have been published as a Report which can be obtained from the Secretariat of the ICBP price 6s.

Asian Continental Section

The Asian Section of the ICBP is to be congratulated for being the first Continental Section to issue a News Letter. The first number of the Asian Section News (which is printed in the same format as the President's Letter) contains reports from India on the case of the Indian Gray Jungle-fowl; Japan, on the development of bird protection in the past two years; Korea on the Status of wild life Conservation, and Malaya on National problems in bird protection. Copies of the Asian News (for which no charge is made) may be obtained from the Asian Section, ICBP, c/o Yamashina Institute for Ornithology, 49 Nampaidai-machi, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, Japan.

S. Dillon Ripley

NOTES AND COMMENTS

E. F. GEE

The death of Mr E. F. Gee on the 21st October is a great loss to Conservationists in India. He had after his retirement devoted himself entirely to preserving India's Wild Life, and though he was principally interested in mammals he had taken some excellent photographs of Indian birds. He had very generously willed that all his books, manuscripts, and photographs should be given over to the Bombay Natural History Society after his death.

Readers will recall that at the Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club which was held on 17th December 1966, Mr E. F. Gee was present and showed his excellent films on elephants, orchids, and the Anas and Kaziranga sanctuaries.

May his soul rest in peace.

TULSI NATIONAL PARK

The Maharashtra Government is proceeding with its plans for turning Tulsi into a National Park. During the Wild Life Week in October it was proposed to introduce a few chital into the forest. Unfortunately this could not be done but some deer and peafowl were kept in an enclosure which has been put up recently. Apparently a panther has got into the enclosure and has killed the deer. This is encouraging in so far as it shows that carnivores still exist in this forest. The enclosure has now been strengthened and is going to be used as a breeding centre for deer which will then be let loose in the forest.

12TH MEETING OF THE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

At the 12th meeting of the Tourist Development Council in New Delhi towards the end of October it was encouraging to see that several resolutions were passed in connection with Wild Life Tourism. It was emphasized that Shikar Tourism should be played down and more importance given to just viewing birds and animals in our sanctuaries.

Incidentally in a background paper presented on the occasion it was pointed out that at Tiger Tops in Nepal half a million dollars per year are earned from visitors who came there mainly for wild life photography. India could better that figure if the business was properly organised.

YOUNG BIRDMATCHERS

Santosh (9 years) and Anand (10 years) (students of Mrs Jamal Ara) are to be congratulated on sending in a list of birds. 'We are always on the lookout for birds while going and coming from our schools' Last winter Anand brought a Redbreasted Flycatcher with injured wing. The bird was bleeding badly. Mrs Ara at once gave it first aid. The bleeding stopped and the bird recovered fully after 3 hours. It started flying and hopping a bit. By noon the bird flew away.'

CORRESPONDENCEBlue Rock Thrush visiting Indian Museum gardens

The Blue Rock Thrush that visited regularly in the quadrangle enclosed within the main building of the Indian Museum (reported before in the Newsletter) was no more seen in the winter of 1967-68. Its visits in different years are tabulated below:

<u>Years</u>	<u>Arrival</u>	<u>Departure</u>
1960-61	..	April 1961
1961-62	Oct. 1961	April 1962
1962-63	Sept. 1962	30 March 1963
1963-64	30 Octo. 1963	April 1964
1964-65	Sept. 1964	April 1965
1965-66	Sept. 1965	April 1966
1966-67	3 Nov. 1966	April 1967

In this connexion I would like to mention that my colleagues have noticed the very bird in the winter of 1959. It may therefore be concluded that this particular Blue Rock Thrush paid a regular visit to its winter quarters in Calcutta, in the quadrangle of the Indian Museum during a period of seven years from 1959 to 1967.

S. S. Saha
Indian Museum, Calcutta
October 1968

House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) nesting in trees

In J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 52: 601 Mr Humayun Abdulali recorded having seen a colony of five House Sparrows nesting in the dry leaves of a palm not cut for some time, and drooping against its stem forming a large pad, c. 20 ft up under the growing leaves, in Gandhi Gardens, Karachi, in May 1949. In the same note he referred to Ticehurst and other (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 28: 230) recording the race biblicus as nesting in bushes, and trees especially poplar in Mesopotamia. An editorial note to Mr Abdulali's observations referred to Breeding Birds of Kashmir: 169 wherein Bates and Lowther state that in Kashmir many House Sparrows found in well-wooded country and on forest fringes breed more or less in colonies in natural hollows in trees.

In the second half of October, current year, my attention was attracted to the commotion that was being kicked up one morning by a pair of House Sparrows in the compound of a church in Bandra, against a batch of five House Crows. The crows were continuously flying to an Ashok Tree (*Polycythia longifolia*) and unsuccessfully attempting to land on it about 15 ft from the ground. Walking up to the tree to investigate the crows' target of attack, I found that the sparrows had a nest in the tree with cheeping young in it. The crows were trying in vain to rifle the nest. The nest was a large mass of dry grass and straw, stuck among the drooping, matted twigs of the tree, with an oval-shaped entrance to it.

It is difficult to understand as to what prompted this pair of House Sparrows to select a tree in a locality where its usual favourite nesting sites are aplenty.

J. S. Serrao

Diwali Greetings

Diwali is a festival of lights for many disgruntled and inebriate people complain a festival of noise. Be what it may, to us birdwatchers it is the festival which is brought on the wings of many migrants, returning to us once again from their northerly ranges. October, the month in which Diwali generally falls is a golden month, the gold of ripening grasses on the hills, of fields of millets and groundnuts ready for the harvest, the month of blue lakes, sparkling streams, limpidly blue skies and brilliant sunshine. The heat is subdued, a chill touches the air at dawn and dusk. It is a month of sprouting fields of wheat; a month of moderation when the sun is hot, but the shade is cool, languid breezes stir the dark green foliage of large trees and sweep of the drying leaves of the acacias and mimosa preparatory for the long dormancy till the next June storm. It is the month when the last rains are still a memory and signs of the cool weather are perceptible. It is a fine month indeed, a month of contentment and of expectancy.

Most of the winter migrants are here, I have seen Black Redstarts, Common Swallows, Rosy Pastors, Pale Harriers, Tawny Pipits, Tree Pipits, Grey Wagtails, White Wagtails, Yellow Wagtails, immense flocks of Short-toed Larks, Lesser White-throats, Common and Green Sandpipers, Kestrels and the like. Passage migrants which are abundant during September have all passed, though there still may be seen a few Spotted Flycatchers and Kashmir Rollers. For the winter have come Redbreasted Flycatchers, Brown Shrikes, Large Green Bee-eaters, Pied Bush Chats, Collared Bush Chats, Pied and Desert Wheatears and the unobtrusive Wren-ticks. Hoopoes are plentiful and on almost every banyan along the roads is stationed a Bay-backed Shrike which in this part of the country is a winter migrant. The same is true of the Indian Roller, though a few pairs stay on and breed in the larger groves of garbled and ageing trees.

So, may I wish a happy birdwatching season to all the friends of our Club?

K. S. Lavkumar
Rajkot, 21 Oct. 1968

Chilka Lake Survey

I refer to the remark by Mr R. A. S. Melliish in volume 8(11), November 1968 of the Newsletter concerning the visit of the Society's party to Chilka Lake, and would draw Mr Melliish's attention to the article 'Chilka Lake: A Pilot Survey for banding possibilities' by K. S. Lavkumar published in volume 63(2), August 1966 of the Society's journal.

J. C. Daniel

Curator

Bombay Natural History Society

Rain Quail

I enjoyed going through the account about the Rain Quail. I wonder whether this species is also known as the Calling Quail. In Jammu we had got a whole collection, and we used them for a fascinating pastime. Early in the morning we used to go to Hanbirsinghpura with our baskets of calling quails. The rice fields are the favourite haunt — I don't blame them as Hanbirsinghpura produces the best variety of rice. A net was fixed in one corner of the field and the baskets of calling quails placed nearby. From the other end two people held the rope and instead of a tug-of-war they walked till they reached very near the net and lo behold one found invariably twenty or more quails. There had to be a special game license for this.

Mrs Raj Bedi

New Delhi

Chilka Lake Survey

I thank Mr Daniel for reminding me of this article; which I had read and forgotten, and apologize to the Society and to Mr Lavkumar for foolishly complaining that no report of this expedition had been published.

Mr Lavkumar invariably writes well, and this particular article of his is evocative, illuminating, and a pleasure to read. Excellent though it is, however, it makes no pretence of being a systematic, scientific report, and this is probably why I overlooked it. It would have been interesting to see a systematic, annotated list of species observed (perhaps as an appendix to the narrative?). Without such a thing any narrative account is likely to be an incomplete record. For instance, Mr Lavkumar makes no mention of the Snipebilled Godwit, Limnodromus semipalmatus, which I believe his party collected and which must have been one of its more important discoveries. Ringed Plovers are mentioned. Does the writer really mean the extremely rare Ringed Plover, hiaticula, or the common Little Ringed Plover, dubius? The only species of flamingo mentioned is lesser, but no assessment of numbers is made and since this is possibly a new record for the area it would have been useful. And were the big Phoenicopterus roseus unobserved? Such information would probably not have been omitted from a systematic list.

R. A. Stewart Melliish

Parakeets: Flights to roosts

Birdwatching has developed in me the habit of looking up at the trees and the open sky (though a bit dangerous at times) and I am often rewarded with the sight of a solitary bird or a flight of birds. Returning from office in the evening at Dadar, I see flights of roosting and large parakeets returning to their roosting places. The flights are mostly from north to south. During the last few days, on my evening walks, I have had more opportunities of observing these flights, which follow one after another in rapid succession between 5.30 and 6 p.m. I have estimated about 50 birds in a big flight. Of course, some stray birds leisurely follow the main flight chattering and fighting. This evening I counted about 20 such flights within half an hour, though I may have missed quite a few. However I am anxious to know through any of our readers if these flights are also observed in the morning when these birds go to their feeding grounds, and their approximate time.

Bahadur A. Palkhiwala

26 October 1968

Zafar Futehally

Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32 Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58-48